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The PROGRESS *of* VICE.

BEING THE

SUBSTANCE

OF SOME

SERMONS

Preached in

CARTER-LANE.

On PSALM i. 1.

By *THOMAS NEWMAN.*

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THE PREFACE.

WHEN there is ſuch a number of treatiſes already extant, very ſtrongly pleading the cauſe of Religion and Virtue, ſome may think that the world ſhould not be troubled with more, without ſome ſpecial *reaſon, or ſome* particular *Apology. But I declare I have no* particular *reaſon for the publication of this, and yet I ſhall not ſo much as attempt an Apology.*

I have long, with great uneaſineſs and concern, beheld the waſte and deſolation that many younger *minds of both ſexes have ſuſtained; which, when I have by converſation and enquiry traced to their cauſe, I have generally found hath been owing principally, if not entirely, to corrupting principles and*

wicked company. I have in the following pages therefore done my beſt, as briefly and plainly as I could, to expoſe the groundleſſneſs and abſurdity of the one, and to ſet the danger of the other to view: hoping, through the grace of God, in ſome degree to aſſiſt towards the diſabuſing thoſe minds that have been merely deluded by the plauſibility of the former, and the awakening the thoughtleſs who were in no apprehenſion of hazard from the latter.

The principles I have endeavoured to explode were not choſen out of others for their weakneſs, but their ſtrength: I could recollect none that were more plauſible, and I really laboured to give them all their ſtrength, as far as expreſſion would contribute. Whether they are confuted, the Reader muſt judge: I profeſs to deſign *their confutation. If I have not under any of the heads ſuggeſted any* new *thoughts or arguments, to thoſe of greater reading*

or of more extenſive reach than myſelf, yet it will be a great ſatisfaction if I have ſet old *ones in a more convincing light to any mind; or if, by the connection of things, what is here ſaid carries any ſtronger conviction to any perſon, than what they have met with before.*

I write with a particular view to the benefit of thoſe who are entring, or have but a few years ſince entred, upon the world. I am very apprehenſive of their great danger of being corrupted and led away to their preſent and final ruin, by thoſe two ſources of Vice which are here enlarged on, and which, as ſteps, moſt ſpeedily and fatally prepare for the finiſhed Character of the Scorner. I do not ſay from any perſonal diſcontent or diſappointment, nor with any reflection upon Divine Providence "that former days were better "than theſe:" though as to the fact in general I believe it might be aſſerted,

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more eſpecially in reſpect of the Education of young perſons, the Sobriety of the friends of Liberty, and the Religion of the Religious. But, I will venture to affirm " *that theſe days are* " *not better than former ones:*" *and if ſo, the wiſeſt and beſt will ſmile upon* every *ſincere and regular attempt, as I hope this will be accounted, towards the preſervation or reſcue of the riſing generation from the deceptions and ſnares of vice; ſince thoſe of that Character in former days have thought no time or pains better beſtowed, nor a love to Religion and Mankind better evidenced, than in that way.*

However defective this attempt may be towards its profeſſed end in the judgment of any, I deſire they would take no other revenge upon it, for the ſake of the intention, than to employ their better parts and pens in the ſame work, and with the ſame view: and herein, the Author gives it under his hand, he

will

will not only forgive, but thank them, though this ſhould thereby be ſet aſide. As for thoſe into whoſe hands this may fall, I deſire whenever they ſit down to read, they would read a Chapter at once, in order to their having a fuller view of the Subject, and the forming a better judgment of the propriety of each part. And when they have read it once, if it will bear, I would deſire them to give it a ſecond reading; that they may have the anſwers and the arguments ready for uſe in an hour of danger and temptation.

The reaſonings are the ſtrongeſt, and the advices the beſt that I was maſter of: what the fruit of all may be, I know not. But if any one ſhall derive from hence a greater dread of the beginnings of vice, ſtronger and more effectual reſolutions againſt the ſnares and temptations to it, and are more determined for holineſs and Heaven---- God ſhall have the glory: whoſe influ-

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ence and bleſſing I moſt unfeignedly implore and depend upon for ſucceſs, in this and all other like attempts of uſefulneſs to Mankind. In the proſpect of that bleſſing towards the rendering this uſeful to ſome, I am fully prepared for any thing I may meet with from any quarter, though it be ungrateful in itſelf; and but for the hopes of that bleſſing to that end, I would never preach or write more.

Psalm i. 1.

Bleſſed is the Man that walketh not in the Counſel of the Ungodly, nor ſtandeth in the Way of Sinners, nor ſitteth in the Seat of the Scornful.

IF there be any thing in the Objection againſt Religion, That it is a *conſiderable time* before the difficulties of it are conquered, and before any *pleaſure* is found in it, and that theſe can never be experienced without great labour and ſtruggle; doubtleſs it is equally an Objection againſt Vice, that perſons cannot *preſently* be inſenſible of the *pains* and *miſeries* that accompany it, nor *preſently* ſubdue that Shame and Fear which the God of Nature hath implanted as guards againſt it, and as the puniſhment of it under a conviction of guilt. Inſenſibility and Hardneſs is a work of time, and, where there hath been the advantage of a good Education, the attainment thereof requires *more painful* labour, than the attainment of that habitual goodneſs from whence the pleaſures and ſatisfactions of Religion are found. Sin gains its firſt admiſſion more eaſily, and ſometimes very ſuddenly; but no one arrives at any great heights of wickedneſs, but by degrees. Some ſteps are in order of nature before others; but e-

very one paves the way for the next: one thing leads on to another, and one Sin very often creates a neceſſity for more to diſguiſe or to defend it, till the Creature dares not look back, but plunges as deep as he can to drown Reaſon and Conſcience; by which his Character is finiſhed for wickedneſs, his State for miſery. Scripture very often preſcribes our duty under the recommendation of it to us as our happineſs: The reaſon of which is evidently this, "To aſſure us of the inſeparable connection "between them, and to lead us always to look up-"on the articles of our duty as the means of our "felicity." The text runs in this manner; deſcribing the religious Perſon under the Character of the bleſſed or happy one. It is well known, the two general articles of duty are, "The ceaſing from "or avoiding evil, and the practiſing of what is "good:" The text immediately reſpects the former, pointing out a means peculiarly ſerviceable thereto; which is, the renouncing all converſe, ſociety, and friendſhip with the wicked as ſuch, or as far as in our circumſtances it can be avoided. This in the general is all that ſome learned perſons will allow to be the Pſalmiſt's deſign. Others think, and in my account more truly, that he intended a particular *gradation* in theſe words; that he riſes from one degree of wickedneſs to another, and thereby deſcribes different *ranks* of Sinners, or different *ſtages* of Vice. I infer not this from the bare terms of Ungodly, Sinners, and Scornful, becauſe I know the two firſt at leaſt are uſed promiſcuouſly; but from the three expreſſions *taken entire*. They *firſt* walk in the counſel of the Ungodly, *then* ſtand in the

the way of Sinners, and *at laſt* come to ſit in the ſeat of the Scornful. And as theſe are thus ſet after one another, they have a great deal of natural influence one upon another.

I perſuade myſelf, could many, who have run great lengths of Impiety and Vice, have foreſeen or been brought to believe the tendency and influence of their *firſt Steps* towards the *laſt Stage*, or what the beginnings would have led them to, they would have ſhuddered, and have expreſſed their own horror and deteſtation in as ſtrong a manner as thoſe who were concerned for them: Whilſt thoſe very perſons proceeding *gradually* from one ſtep to another, have without much reluctancy been drilled on to conſummate Vice, and have ſat down there with great ſecurity. As deſcribing therefore a *Progreſs* of Vice from one degree or ſtation of it to another, I ſhall conſider theſe words.

CHAP. I.

SECT. I.

THE firſt ſtage or ſtep here mentioned, as leading to a riveted conſummate ſtate of Impiety, is *the walking in the Counſel of the Ungodly.*

By this I apprehend is meant, conſulting and adviſing with them, or which is the ſame thing, imbibing their maxims and principles, and acting upon them. By principles, I mean *leading opinions*, which are eminently at the foundation of practice. Thus it is ſaid of *Ahaziah*, that *he walked after the*

Counſel of the houſe of *Ahab* *. He took his maxims and meaſures from them. In like manner when *Job* had mentioned ſome of the principles of the prophane, ſuch as the denying any obligations to a regard of God, or any advantages accruing from any regards paid to him; to convince his friends that he was not of their tribe he adds, *The Counſel of the Wicked is far from me* †: That is, "I deteſt "ſuch principles and maxims as theſe, and will "never take my meaſures from them, or be influ-"enced by them." The greateſt part of Mankind indeed, run into the madneſſes of iniquity from habitual careleſſineſs and inattention as to good and evil: they have none to call them to reflection, and their tyrannous inclinations hurry them on to one thing after another, as it preſents itſelf. But generally ſpeaking, when thoſe who have had any thing deſerving the name of Education, throw off the impreſſions and influences thereof, they have their underſtandings firſt abuſed by falſe propoſitions and reaſonings: their errors in practice, when they are any thing prevalent, are grounded on ſome errors as to principles. I ſay not that they are always *deceived* into them: they may probably ſometimes ſee the falſity of them, but a ſinful inclination diſpoſes them *to wiſh* they were true; and when that is made judge, or hath leave to repreſent things to the underſtanding, a lie is ſooner embraced and believed too than we are aware of.

Under this head, may it not be very proper and uſeful to conſider ſome of thoſe Principles which in their nature and deſign promote wickedneſs, and

* 2 Chron. xxii. 5. † Job xxi. 16.

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deſtroy Piety and Virtue? By which many in the intereſt of Vice are defending and ſupporting their practice, and have with too much ſucceſs proſelyted others. They are various; I ſhall mention thoſe which are moſt plauſible, moſt common, and which, as far as I have been able to judge, have done moſt miſchief, under each endeavouring to ſhew their fallacy and want of foundation. To begin.

SECT. II.

SOME of the more ingenuouſly wicked have deviſed this that they might at once excuſe and purſue their ſinful inclinations, and hereby many have been corrupted. They ſuggeſt, "That there is "a chain of cauſes and effects flowing from the "nature of Man and the nature of things, deriv-"ing a neceſſity upon human actions: in ſuch "and ſuch circumſtances, perſons cannot *but* do "as they do: ſuch cauſes concurring, ſuch ef-"fects muſt *unavoidably* follow: in particular ſitu-"ations and under particular appearances of things, "perſons are *neceſſarily* led to one particular Be-"haviour; they *muſt* act ſo and ſo, and can't do "otherwiſe: hereupon, there is no action they "are chargeable with, how bad ſoever, that they "could help doing when they did it, any more than "the fire, if I may ſo expreſs it, can help burn-"ing." By this principle of fate and neceſſity many have endeavoured to make themſelves eaſy in their Vices, and to reconcile others to the ſame practice. And it muſt be owned, if there is really ſuch a

fatality

fatality and neceſſity as to human actions, it wipes off all the crime and guilt from the worſt.

But to ſhew the fallacy of this to every capacity, I need only aſk, With what juſtice do we blame or proſecute a Felon or a Murderer, let the injury or cruelty be ever ſo great; if they *could do no otherwiſe* at that time and under thoſe circumſtances? Every proſecution of ſuch a one would be downright barbarity and cruelty in us, if there be any ſuch things; and every execution of thoſe we now ſtyle the worſt of criminals, would then be Murder: for it would be taking away the life of an *innocent* perſon; becauſe he could not *but* do what he did: nay, whatever injury he did to others could not be criminal, if *neceſſitated* by his very frame, or which is the ſame thing, by his Maker, to do as he did.

But let me appeal to every one; and we need go no further than ourſelves for a confutation of this. Are we told that human actions are attended with a fatality, that mankind muſt *neceſſarily* act as they do, and cannot do otherwiſe? ——Let us but reflect upon the workings of our own minds under the ſenſe of what we ſtyle a vitious Act. Is it not many times engaged in with great *reluctancy* and *oppoſition* from the mind? Do not our Conſciences check in the commiſſion, ſmite and reproach us when we have done it? Are we not fill'd with ſhame and uneaſineſs upon a reflection? Whence doth this ariſe? Is it not evidently from our own ſenſe of the *voluntarineſs* of our actions; or of *the power we had of not doing* what we did? It can proceed from nothing elſe: it can belong to nothing but actions, properly our own, perfectly voluntary,

ry, in oppoſition to neceſſity, which might have been avoided, and for the evil of which *we know we are anſwerable.*

If we would but attend to our minds, we ſhould find that our uneaſineſs under a conſciouſneſs of a wicked act is altogether of *another kind*, from what attends any event we could not help. Suppoſing any event brought upon us purely by Providence, this may excite *Grief*; but it never did, it never will produce *Shame* and *Self-reproach:* and the reaſon is, becauſe we could not prevent or avoid it. When we do find Self-accuſations and Reproaches under ſome actions, which is more or leſs Univerſal, doth not every one ſee a direct imputation of thoſe actions to ourſelves, and a charging ourſelves with them as free and voluntary, and which might have been forborn? Can any creature that is reaſonable believe thoſe actions to be fatal, for which they blame themſelves as much as they could do were they ever ſo free, or ever ſo much the matter of choice? Our own Conſciences then, if but attended to, ſufficiently confute this principle of a fatality or neceſſity accompanying our actions: our own ſenſe and feeling is altogether on the ſide of Liberty: if our ſenſations do not impoſe upon us, we are *ſure* we are free; and ſince our own experience is ſufficient to expoſe this principle, I hope we ſhall not be corrupted by it; for that would be to be argued out of our experience, againſt which no argument is allowed valid. And if the ſenſe of our own minds may not be depended upon to aſcertain our liberty or power of ſelf-determination, we may be deceived as to our underſtandings themſelves,

ſince

ſince we have nothing but *that* to aſſure us we do underſtand, or have any perception of truths: And then all diſputes about this and every thing elſe is quite idle. Let us but conſult our own minds then, and ſee how it is with them under ſuch actions, and if we are honeſt we may ſoon detect the deluſion and fallacy. This wretched opinion may in time probably help us off with the ſhame and fear that our Vices occaſion; but in the mean time, that very ſhame and fear which we feel from a vitious act, is a ſtanding evidence of the falſhood of the principle.

SECT. III.

ANOTHER counſel or principle of the Ungodly is this, "That it is not ſuppoſable ſo "great and happy a Being as God is ſhould take "notice of any thing that we do. What is it "to him what we are, or how we behave? It is "not likely ſo perfect a Being ſhould concern himſelf with any thing without himſelf, much leſs "intereſt himſelf in human affairs, or with what is "done by the Children of Men."

This principle, tho' it in words acknowledges a Divine Being, *in deed* and *in effect* denies it. It lays the Ax to the root of all Religion; it takes off all reſtraints, all fear of puniſhment and all hope of reward; it renders all the expreſſions of Religion and all apprehenſions of future Retribution, idle and ridiculous. For theſe two things are inſeparably connected, "If God hath no concern with us, "we have none with him."

That we may not be led to walk by this principle, let us consider, What is it that should render it unlikely or impossible for God to concern himself with our affairs, or that should render it absolutely indifferent to him how we behave? This must flow from something in his Nature or ours.——What is there *in his* Nature to render his regarding our behaviour as a Governour so very absurd a thing? Is it because it would break in upon his happiness, and interrupt his own Self-enjoyment? This is grounded on a most ridiculous notion of the Divine Felicity; as if it lay in indolence and inactivity: And also of the manner of exercising the Divine Perfections; as if regarding the actions of Mankind must be a toil, a care, and the cause of weariness. This is to measure the power of the Creator by the weakness of Creatures, and to conclude that of him who is absolutely perfect, which we find in ourselves because of our imperfections. Did he make the World? If we think in that absurd manner of him, that the Principle would lead us to do, must not such a complicated System of things, so various as to parts, so exact and various as to design, lead us to imagine it cost him great *labour* and *anxiety*, and was a great interruption to his repose? But is not this a very stupid whim? And is it not as silly to suppose he cannot regard our behaviour without interrupting his own happiness, or to impute so mean an imperfection as toil or trouble to God?

Nor is that notion of the Divine Greatness more just or wise, from whence Men would argue it to be unworthy or unbecoming God to concern himself

ſelf with us, or to regard our conduct and behaviour. For, the Greatneſs that under this pretence is aſcribed to God, is no better than a weak pride, a mean haughtineſs, a ſupercilious diſdain; which is one of the ſillieſt and moſt contemptible diſpoſitions that can belong to a poor elevated Mortal; which we moſt juſtly ſcorn and deſpiſe amongſt ourſelves. It's true, we are mean, we are nothing when compared with himſelf; but are we not in the rank of Beings wherein he placed us? It was not beneath his Excellency to produce ſuch Beings as we are, why ſhould it be ſo to regard and obſerve us? Eſpecially ſince he hath capacitated us for regarding and obſerving him.

But what profit or detriment, ſaith the principle, can accrue to him from us? I anſwer, none at all. But, doth it therefore follow, "*That we have "nothing to do with him or he with us?*" Here alſo I would appeal to the experience and practice of thoſe who hold this principle, for a confutation of it.

And I would ask them if they ever pray to God? I don't ſuppoſe ſuch do it as an expreſſion of obedience or homage: but do they not as a meer *natural* act, without any *previous deliberation* implore the Divine Help in extream danger, and ſeek Divine Relief under oppreſſions and ſtraits? Do they not in many caſes which are deſperate, and which ſeem remedileſs as to human power, addreſs themſelves to Heaven? And do they not conſtantly do this as from an impulſe of Nature, without reflection, without a prompter? Now certainly, it is as vain and ridiculous for them to pray in their diſtreſs, as in a way of dutiful homage to God, if he is wholly

wholly regardleſs of their affairs and indifferent to their behaviour: if God hath forſaken the earth why have they recourſe to him in their extremities any more than at other times? If he takes no notice of what we do, what ſignifies Prayer under one circumſtance more than under another? —— But let ſuch anſwer this alſo: why ſhould they feel that powerful *inſtinct* urging them to apply to Heaven, or why that *inwrought propenſion* in human nature to implore Divine Regards and to carry them to God, if it was not the deſign of him that implanted it to aſſure *that he could and did regard them?* Why ſhould they *involuntarily* lift up their eyes to Heaven when they knew not what to do, and when they deſpiſe Prayer at all other times; but that their Maker deſigned this inſtinct in their very frame, as a teſtimony he *doth* concern himſelf with this world, and intereſt himſelf in their behaviour? And if by their prayers they allow of the Divine Regard in one reſpect, why not in another? If they allow that he regards thoſe petitions extorted by diſtreſs, why ſhould he not regard thoſe which carry worſhip and homage in them? And if God takes notice of Prayer, why not of the good and evil actions of their lives in general? Since the one is no more inconſiſtent with his excellency and happineſs than the other. However unwilling libertines may be to allow of a Divine Cognizance of their behaviour, as being a rub in their way and an unanſwerable obligation to Religion, yet I affirm, nothing can be brought againſt it, but ſilly and mean repreſentations of the Divine Perfections; and every one hath that in their own frame, which, if attended to, would confute any principle that denied it.

SECT. IV.

ANOTHER principle or counſel of the Ungodly is this, " How can it be thought that " God ſhould be diſpleaſed with us for taking *little* " liberties, or a *little* pleaſure? We don't hurt him " by it: nay, we don't *intend* any offence to him, " nor to do any thing in meer oppoſition to him, but " only to pleaſe and gratify ourſelves a little; at " which ſuch a Good Being as he is can never be " angry." I have expreſſed this as I have ſeveral times heard it. If it were put into plain *Engliſh*, I think it would run thus, " How can we think that " any thing is diſpleaſing to God that is pleaſing " to us?" And when ſo put, it anſwers itſelf. But to be a little more particular.

Theſe *little* liberties, gaieties, and pleaſures, as they are ſtyled, are Moral Iniquities: this is ſuppoſed in the principle that I am endeavouring to expoſe. Now nothing of this kind can be *little* or trifling, and from the perfect rectitude of the Divine Nature we can moſt certainly conclude, that every thing of that kind muſt be as hateful to God as his threat'nings intimate. Let inclination then dreſs them up in any terms of diminution it cannot alter their nature; tho' it may facilitate the practice of them to the Libertine, it can no way leſſen the Divine Abhorrence of the actions, or of the perſons who are chargeable with them: *That* is unchangeable. Such diminiſhing ſentiments of Vice were never dictated by underſtanding or reaſon; they are the pure language and effects of Inclina-

Inclination. But there is not a more flagrant or more fatal deluſion, " Than for us to judge of our " actions by one ſtandard, whilſt God will judge " of them by another."——As for our *hurting God* by our Vices, it is acknowledged we cannot; but we neceſſarily diſhonour him by them: which from a Wiſe, Holy, and Righteous Governour, will as certainly be followed with his reſentments, as actual hurt and damage ſuſtained by another, can be ſuppoſed to be followed with the expreſſions of their diſpleaſure where they have power. —— As for the *not intending any immediate affront to God* in their actions, whereby ſuch arguers would colour the liberties they take, and ſcreen themſelves from the Divine anger; I would reply by asking, whether they do not *engage* in ſuch liberties *with full intention*, whether they do not *intend the acts* themſelves, and alſo whether they do not know at the time, " That God hath forbid them?" I believe this won't be denied. Why then, there muſt be " an " intention of doing an act known to be diſplea- " ſing to God;" which, with the help of all their diſtinctions, falls very little ſhort of acting from an intended oppoſition to God. Thoſe can never be juſtly ſtyled *little* liberties, which are intentionally at the expence of the Divine Honour and Regard: and no one that knows any thing of God, or of the difference between good and evil, can think to waſh away the guilt thereof by ſaying, " they " only intended to gratify and pleaſe themſelves."

SECT.

SECT. V.

ANOTHER counſel of the Ungodly is this; "The Mercy of God is infinite, and there-"fore tho' they do take ſome liberties that he may "not allow, yet they doubt not but that they ſhall find "ſhelter and ſanctuary in that Mercy at laſt. *Such* "a Being cannot be ſo ſevere as to puniſh them; "for how can that Mercy be *infinite* that doth not "extend to them? Beſides, can it ever be thought "that God made any Creature to damn it?" By this many encourage themſelves in a wicked way, and by ſuch a principle many, young perſons eſpecially, are in danger of being proſelyted to Vice, of becoming very free with it, and of contemning all the means of reclaiming them. For under the expectations of ſuch a Mercy, let the meaſure of their Vices be what it will, there can be no apprehenſion of ſuffering, or fear of being called to an account.

If we meet with any ſuch Counſellors, Let us ask them what they mean by *infinite* Mercy: the term is deluſive. Do they mean by it an *unlimited*, *a boundleſs* mercy, or one that will include *all* at laſt, let them be what they will? If they had ever taken counſel of Reaſon, not to ſay of the Goſpel of *Jeſus*, they would have known *ſuch* a Mercy cannot poſſibly be Divine or belong to God. Unleſs all our natural Ideas as well as the revealed account of the Divine Nature fail us, God's and muſt be a *perfect* Mercy: that is, ſuch a One as agrees to a Being, poſſeſſed of every other Perfection as well as Mercy.

cy. It is the Mercy of Wiſdom, Juſtice, Truth, and Holineſs, and accordingly is ever exerciſed in perfect harmony with them. They are all of them but his Simple Eſſence; he is one as truly and perfectly as the other. The abſolute Rectitude of the Divine Nature then muſt neceſſarily *limit* this Mercy; the equally eſſential Attributes of Wiſdom, Purity, and Juſtice muſt *ſet bounds* to the exerciſes of it. It is not a meer Good-nature; it is not a compaſſionate inſtinct which works as light flows from the Sun, neceſſarily, or without choice and freedom: if this was the caſe, what gratitude would be due to God from us for his Mercy? But, on the contrary, it is a Moral Perfection in him, the exerciſes of which are to be expected from him *only*, as Wiſdom conducts and determines, as Purity admits, and as Juſtice, or the preſervation of his own rights, agrees therewith. This Mercy is very great indeed, or as the Scripture aſſures us, it greatly tranſcends the moſt perfect mercy and compaſſion that is found amongſt men: but of courſe it hath its *proper* objects, to the excluſion of thoſe who are not ſo. And whether this is likely to be a Sanctuary or Refuge to thoſe who go on in their iniquities upon the preſumption of it, I think every one who can diſtinguiſh may be left to judge in a ſober hour.

As for that other way of expreſſing this principle, "Can it be thought that God made any creature "to damn it?" If the Queſtion be, whether God hath made any creature with an *original intention or abſolute deſign* finally to damn it; I anſwer, No: deteſted be the thought! I abhor it as blaſphemy that

that nothing can exceed. * But if the Queſtion be, whether any creature that God hath made, *will or can finally be damned*, or *not be the object of his Mercy at laſt?* I anſwer, yea; and all that hath been ſuggeſted under this head is a proof of it. Meer Mercy is no more a true Idea of God than meer Power. If his Mercy is a *perfection* it muſt be limited; if it is the Mercy of an holy, wiſe, and righteous Being it cannot be boundleſs: the Principle then that enſures Mercy to ALL at laſt muſt be as falſe, as that God is wiſe, holy, and juſt, is true.

* I cannot forbear here entring a ſolemn caution againſt any *ſuch like* imputation or thought of God: and that not only from the blaſphemy and injury which it carries in it to his All-perfect nature, but alſo from the terrible conſequences which it naturally draws after it upon the mind that embraces it. The worſhip of God, if it be real, both ſuppoſes and encreaſes our veneration and eſteem of him; and the foundation of our honour and admiration muſt be the Character that he bears *with us*, or the perfections which he is apprehended *by us* to poſſeſs. If now, arbitrarineſs, cruelty, unrighteouſneſs, or any thing eſſentially evil be imagined by us, either to belong to the Divine Nature, or to be the ſubject-matter of God's will and pleaſure, there is very great danger of our being reconciled to thoſe evils, from the veneration we pay the Being in whom they are ſuppoſed to ſubſiſt, and of our deriving from thence diſpoſitions of the ſame kind. From whatever *accidents* it may be ſometimes otherwiſe, I am ſure there is nothing more natural and therefore probable, than for perſons to loſe their juſt abhorrence of thoſe evils, if not to come to eſteem them as excellencies and virtues, when they have once cloathed God with ſuch qualities, repreſented him to themſelves *as acting* with them, and worſhip him *as thus repreſented:* and what is ſtill more, as their veneration of *ſuch* a Being riſes, the danger of their reconciliation to and imitation of *ſuch* evils increaſes.

SECT.

SECT. VI.

I WILL add one thing more as a Counſel or Principle of the Ungodly, upon which they act, and by which they enſnare others: "Tho' we in-"dulge at preſent, ſay they, in ſinful liberties, we "can leave them when we will: we can as eaſily "quit as we engage, and forſake them whenever we "have a mind to it." Hereupon, when ſuch are in company with thoſe of tenderer minds and better principles than their own, who from thence refuſe to run with them to exceſs, they argue with them upon this principle, as if they had proved the truth of it; "It is but for once and away, you need not "make a practice of it." And by this many have been initiated in Vice, and their reſolutions againſt it have been undermined and ſtole from them. But

Let us remember there is not a greater deception in the world than this, "That a perſon who in any "degree hath followed vice can quit it at pleaſure." Experience lies directly againſt it; and ſo Univerſal is it, that I am perſuaded no *ſingle fact* can be brought in favour of this principle. Let perſons pretend what they will, it is the difficulty of forſaking the practice that is the cauſe of their perſiſting in it. For, they are often exceeding uneaſy with themſelves, ſick and weary of their courſe: they find their Maſter is very hard, their wages very poor, and from a diſſatisfaction with themſelves they often reſolve very firmly and ſincerely that

 they

they will engage no more. Now, under ſuch circumſtances why don't they do what they ſay is ſo very eaſy to do? What prevents them? Not an approbation of their practice, not a ſatisfaction in their courſe: what is it then, but the labour of reforming, the difficulty of quitting it? Every ſuch perſon is a living confutation of his own principle, and one would think therefore it ſhould carry its own antidote along with it. I muſt inſiſt upon it as the *only* evidence they can give of the truth of this principle, that it is an eaſy thing to quit ſuch practices, *that they do it*, when they know they ſhould, and ſo frequently reſolve within themſelves that they will. Do they call the perſiſting in acts againſt ſtrong and repeated determinations to the contrary, *a leaving them off at pleaſure?* Language won't bear this; and what proteſtation is valid againſt conſtant fact?

The truth is, they know little of human nature or of themſelves, who know not that every ſingle deliberate act leaves ſome diſpoſition in the mind towards a repetition, and that the diſpoſition increaſes in proportion to a repetition. No one can tell what one compliance upon ſuch a principle as this may introduce. The experiment is extremely hazardous: the bounds we may ſet to ourſelves, it is great odds, will never be kept. Inſtead of being at liberty afterwards, there is a proportional entanglement, a biaſs towards a proſecution: every freſh engagement encreaſes the difficulty of a reformation, and leaves a perſon ſtill leſs of a power of acting at pleaſure. —— This principle is equally dangerous as falſe: it is an artifice adapted to the ſervice of Vice:

Vice: it inſinuates itſelf very powerfully from its plauſibleneſs, being calculated to perſuade us, we may give a looſe to inclination, and follow our own gratification, and when we are ſatiated and ſick of it, or have brought ourſelves into the greateſt hazard by it, that we may at once retrieve all, and be preſently in as free and ſafe a ſtate as before. But let us remember it is a *meer* artifice; and none will find themſelves more wretchedly deceived than thoſe who fancy themſelves too cunning for their Sins.

SECT. VII.

AS an improvement of this Subject, let us exerciſe the moſt Religious care what principles we embrace. It ſignifies nothing indeed how juſt and true our Religious ſentiments are, if our practice is not conducted thereby; but yet it is of the utmoſt conſequence with reſpect to practice that our principles are good; thoſe I mean, which are at the foundation of practice, and have a direct influence upon its being good or bad. By means of the Goſpel, thoſe truths which are eminently at the foundation of a Religious courſe are very clear and plain, approving themſelves to every honeſt mind; and would we but try every ſuggeſted principle thereby before we embraced it, if we would not be deceived, we need not. What the eye is to the body, that the Underſtanding is to a perſon's actions. If that be blinded or corrupted what wonder if we go aſtray. If the principles are looſe, it is great odds but the actions are of a vitious kind: when they are

only *conſiſtent* with wickedneſs, how likely is that to prevail? How much more when in their nature they directly *lead* thereto? Then, they give a ſeeming authority to our follies, uphold a looſeneſs of manners, and ſtrengthen us in our irregularities againſt all that Reaſon and Law, God and Conſcience can ſay. I think to this ſubject that caution of our Bleſſed Lord relates. *Take heed that the light that is in thee be not darkneſs* *, for, as he adds in another place, *if the light that is in thee be darkneſs, how great is that darkneſs!* The meaning of which taken together may be this; "Take great heed that "thoſe ſentiments and principles which are to guide "thy courſe be not corrupt and falſe ones: for by "them thou wilt be much more in danger of being "led aſtray than if thou hadſt no light, no princi-"ples at all: if the light itſelf be darkneſs, if that "which ſhould guide, ſeduces, how much more "*certainly* wilt thou go aſtray than if thou hadſt no "guide at all!"——For direction in this matter I would offer the following hints.

Let us judge of principles by their fruit and effect, or by their natural influence upon the Chriſtian temper and life. Sure we are that the Goſpel in general is *a Doctrine according to Godlineſs* †, that it is calculated entirely for the advancement of Piety and Holineſs. Whatever principle is apparently ſubverſive of this, can never be a principle of the Goſpel. I acknowledge, ſometimes tho' it is but ſeldom, thoſe of a vitious tendency may be held, whilſt yet the goodneſs of the heart or ſome better corrective principle held with it, prevents its natural effect: but ſtill this is a

* Luke xi. 35. † 1 Tim. vi. 3.

good

good rule to try our principles by. Our Lord himſelf I think hath laid it down; when, ſpeaking of falſe Prophets, and directing his hearers how to diſtinguiſh them from the preachers of truth and righteouſneſs, he ſaith *by their fruits ye ſhall know them* *; by the corrupt influence and effects of their doctrines. Good principles we know may be *without good* fruit, for by far too many hold the truth of God in unrighteouſneſs: but may we not alſo ſay, they cannot *produce* what is evil, or have any ill influence upon practice. If therefore we meet with any in the world which in their obvious direct tendency would abate our regards of the Great God, would lead us to queſtion his veracity, to preſume upon his mercy, to deſpiſe his grace, to be free with his laws, to mock at ſin, to ſlight conſcience, or render us fearleſs of temptation——in theſe caſes, it is no venture to ſay, *they are vitious and wicked.*

Again; in receiving or holding principles, let us ſee to it that it is Reaſon and Truth, and not meer Inclination that influences. Every vitious perſon may truly be ſaid to be governed by inclination, and in no particular are they more in danger from thence than in reſpect of principles. When inclination is ſtrong on the ſide of Vice, it will naturally ſeek and ſuck in thoſe principles that favour and ſupport it: there is always a readineſs to take ſanctuary in ſuch ſentiments as render a ſinful practice eaſy; that blunt the force of natural principles, and take off the edge of natural conſcience. As to thoſe I have mentioned, few, if any, of tolerable underſtanding and honeſty can embrace them upon con-

* Mat. vii. 16.

viction

viction but from inclination; they certainly captivate at firſt, not by their *truth* but their *comfortableneſs*; not becauſe they are *believed* but becauſe they are *liked*: tho' I don't ſay but ſinful affections may in time bring over the Judgment to themſelves; and indeed it is not preſently to be imagined what corruptions and impoſitions the underſtanding may ſuffer from inclination, nor what bare-faced lies a Man may tell to himſelf, and ſwallow them too, if they are but *comfortable* ones, or as the Prophet ſpeaks, when *they love and like to have* matters as they repreſent them.

Oh! the happineſs of an honeſt heart, of a pious and virtuous mind! How ſafe its courſe! How good its guide! How bold its thoughts! How comfortable its reflections! How peaceful its progreſs! What a ſecurity hath it from itſelf and the Divine Grace under its liableneſs to miſtakes and to be impoſed upon! It carries an antidote within itſelf againſt the contagion of *others* poiſonous principles, and may promiſe itſelf that from God, which ſhall be its preſervation from the damage of any *of its own* too; thoſe which it may poſſibly thro' weakneſs entertain.

Juſtly may we dread the *government* of a vitious inclination: nor let us ever admit *that* to dictate, judge, or determine for us. Tho' a ſtander-by may be ignorant when it is conviction, and when it is inclination that influences in the choice of principles, yet we muſt know it ourſelves; and what is infinitely more, God knows it: the God from whom every one's ſentence ſhall at laſt proceed, which ſhall be governed by his own perfect knowledge of our con-

conduct and character. When persons have a strong disposition to wickedness, they may find out principles sufficient for number and quality to countenance or encourage them, by taking off the restraints God hath provided, or by making them ineffectual: but they should remember withal, nothing but self-delusion can be proposed; they can only flatter and misguide them, and subject them to an overwhelming disappointment: they can be no Apology for their practice, but a distinct article of charge and punishment at an impartial tribunal.

Finally, let us take care we embrace not any principles for the sake of those things that have no concern with the truth of principles themselves. The counsels of the wicked are oftentimes embraced purely for the sake of a general character which those persons bear for ingenuity, wit, or something of that kind: these make them go down insensibly; and oftentimes others, young ones especially, imbibe them upon the reputation of those who hold them. But what hath wit, humour, or any thing of that kind to do with Religious principles, or truth and falshood? Will any one that *hath understanding* sacrifice it to another in a most important affair, because that other is a good jester, can tell a story well, or is allowed to be an ingenuous person? Would it justify me before God, or relieve me on a dying-bed under a dreadful survey of a past life, that I took my principles of conduct from the most *ingeniously* wicked? Universal reason saith, No. Let us then hearken to a very wise man's advice, *Cease my son to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words*

words of knowledge *. The *pretence* may be inſtruction, a bright thought, a new or a free thought; or it may be, an uſeful one; ſuch as, how to ſin and not to be in fault, how to ſtop the mouth of conſcience or ſhake off every reſtraint, how to be too cunning for ſin and too hard for God too —— but, lend not thine ear to ſuch wretched principles: fly from the counſellors, abhor the counſel. — If our aim was but to pleaſe God, to approve ourſelves to him, and get ſafe to Heaven, we ſhould be ſafe. For then, truth would be always ſought, duty always loved and ſtudied, we ſhould keep as far as we could from the brink of danger, and in caſes that were really doubtful ſhould determine on the ſafeſt ſide: we ſhould have the beſt ſecurity from every principle prejudicial to the Chriſtian life, and whatever errors of judgment we fell into they would never corrupt our hearts, or hurt us with reſpect to the Divine Acceptance. May we ſtudiouſly aim at this diſpoſition and Character and ſteadily maintain it; then may we hope to be preſerved from the error of the wicked, and to be conducted in the paths of righteouſneſs unto eternal life; for, "if we would not "leave God, he will not leave us."

* Prov. xix. 27.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

SECT. I.

THE next ſtep or ſtage that the text mentions in the Progreſs of Vice is, *The ſtanding in the way of ſinners.* By this is underſtood in general *a conforming to wicked practices*; and this is the next ſtep to and the natural conſequence of wicked principles. When the underſtanding, which was originally deſigned as the directive faculty, is deluded and corrupted by falſe apprehenſion of things, it is but natural to expect the manners will be corrupt. When thoſe principles are ſucked in that aſſure us we may unreſtrainedly follow our inclinations and be chargeable with no crime; that if we are but *prudent* in our vices we need fear no ill conſequences; that we may violate the Divine commands with impunity amidſt all the Divine threatnings, from an unlimited boundleſs Mercy to which we may fly at laſt.— When theſe principles, I ſay, and ſuch as theſe are embraced, which lay the reins upon the neck of inclination, and at once deliver from all check and reſtraint, how boldly may perſons engage and perſiſt in a vitious courſe, and how abſolutely are all commands, that they do not like, diſpenſed with? If we take this expreſſion of the Pſalmiſt in its general import, it is, as I ſaid before, deſcriptive of habitually vitious practices: but as it here ſtands may it not alſo point to the more particular way, whereby ſuch practices become moſt effec-

tually and ſpeedily habitual? I mean, *the ſeeking the company and acquaintance of Sinners:* putting ourſelves in their way, aſſociating with them, contracting intimacies and friendſhips. When once the underſtanding is corrupted by vitious principles, the mind naturally receives a biaſs to wicked company: the inclination to vice, that befriends ſuch ſentiments and makes way for their admiſſion, diſpoſes to ſuch aſſociates; and then our ſtated experience tells us, vice gains a ſurpriſing aſcendancy in a very little time.

I ſhall conſider the expreſſion in this view: but that I be not miſunderſtood it is neceſſary to obſerve: Whilſt we are members of Society, and follow the ſeveral employments Providence hath fixed us in, it is impoſſible but we ſhould be *thrown* into the way of the wicked, and led in ſome meaſure to converſe with them: nay, even Relation and Kindred may render this unavoidable and neceſſary. But this is *endured* not *choſen* by a ſerious mind, and ſo far indeed it is to every one an unhappineſs and not matter of crime. The ſtanding in the way of ſinners, which I am ſpeaking of, is the *choice* of ſuch company, throwing ourſelves in their way, deſirous of aſſociating and herding with them. It is an old ſaying and a true one, That a perſon is known by his company, or by thoſe he is moſt intimate with and takes moſt delight in: and it is as true, that this doth not only *diſcover* perſons, but *moulds* and *forms* them.

In conſidering theſe words as one of the ſtages of wickedneſs, I ſhall endeavour, I. To ſhew the influence that this ſtanding in the way of ſinners hath upon

upon a likeneſs of manners and practice. II. I would reply to ſome pleas that may be made for ſuch intimacies and friendſhips to evade the force of reproof or reaſonings with ſuch. III. I would offer ſome advices.

SECT. II.

FIRST. I would ſhew the influence that this ſtanding in the way of ſinners hath upon a likeneſs of manners and practice.

1. The being converſant with their ways and manners hath of *itſelf* an inſenſible influence upon the mind and practice. The all-wiſe God himſelf deſigning to preſerve the people of *Iſrael* from idolatry takes this method, not to ſuffer the Canaanites *to dwell in the land leſt they made* Iſrael *to ſin*, or, leſt they ſhould infect *Iſrael* with Idolatry from their ſojourning or being converſant with them *. The language and manners of thoſe we ſtatedly converſe with inſenſibly becomes our own, and what the eye and ear are accuſtomed to, makes deep impreſſions, and transforms before we are aware. How many have and daily do fall into vices to which they have *no* natural propenſion or no *peculiar* propenſity, but meerly from imitation? Without diſpute this is the way by which PROPHANE SWEARING is propagated; ſince there is nothing in any conſtitution to lead to it, ſince there is no pleaſure or profit pleadable as a temptation to it: it is catched purely by Company, taken up meerly from its being the conſtant language of aſſociates.

* Exod. xxiii. 33.

Nay further, were a perſon, ſincerely or eminently pious, accidentally to fall into the company of thoſe who derided the moſt awful things, who could ſcarce ſpeak without throwing out ſome extravagant thing againſt Religion, or who allowed themſelves all manner of liberties with what reſpected the Awful God and the Eternal world; this *at firſt* moſt probably would awaken his zeal, fill him with deteſtation, and rather *raiſe* his Piety than abate it: but let him *frequent* ſuch ſociety and be often with them, and you would ſee him ſoon as languid as before he was warm, and what at firſt quite diſcompoſed him ſhall not at all move him. Daily experience tells us, uſe would reconcile thereto, and merely thro' a cuſtomary hearing of thoſe things they would loſe their horror without any expence of pains; the very familiarity would be ſufficient: and when the horror of the thing is taken off, the foundation of a reconciliation and reſemblance is lay'd. The methods and ways of the company that we keep are ſo inſenſibly ſlidden into, without any deſign on our part, that oftentimes others diſcern the Copy before they do who wear it: it inſinuates and gains like a contagion. 'Tis hazardous even for the beſt eſtabliſhed in Piety and Virtue to be intimate with vice, or familiarly to intermingle with thoſe of that caſt. Such a Scene being continually before the eye and the mind accuſtomed to it, at laſt the things themſelves are aped and the mind is reconciled to them: ſo that *meerly* by being in the way or company of ſinners there is a reſemblance of them ſurprizingly contracted.

SECT.

SECT. III.

2. BY converſing familiarly with ſuch we ſee vice ſet off to the beſt advantage; and thereby the practice of it is more powerfully recommended. Some inclined ſtrongly to taſte vitious pleaſures may find a very conſiderable reſtraint from a natural *timorouſneſs:* upon the preſentment of an opportunity their fear is rouſed, and it may be hath hitherto been their preſervative: but by aſſociating with thoſe who let no ſuch opportunity ſlip, they are embold'ned. When ſo many venture before their eyes from time to time without heſitation, and without a ny apparent ſuffering by it, they are induced to venture too. This fear amidſt theſe bold examples appears, as it never did before, like *Meanneſs* and a *Littleneſs* of Spirit; probably it is ſo repreſented by their companions: from hence a conformity to them comes recommended under the notion of *courage* and *magnanimity.* Others, tho' they find a ſtrong propenſity to ſome vices are reſtrained by a native *Shame*, and from a ſenſe of the reproachfulneſs and ſcandal of ſome iniquities, joined with the apprehenſion of being diſcovered, they have kept themſelves free. But, when they come to herd from time to time with thoſe who can glory in their ſhame, who can make a merit of their reproach, who can boaſt of their exploits, and probably affect to appear more vitious than they really are——in ſuch circumſtances, vice aſ-

ſumes

ſumes the appearance of Glory; a light in which they never before ſaw it: it ſeems to have changed its nature and to become an *ornament*, ſince it furniſhes ſo much pleaſantry for converſation, and ſeems ſuch a qualification for it. The *ſharing* in the laughter and jollity of ſuch companions by mingling with them makes their way appear right, or at leaſt renders their courſe engaging: their mirth transfers ſuch an appearance of innocency on their courſe, or at leaſt ſo far removes the deformity and malignity of it, that the former ſhame is beguiled and ſet aſide, and from better thoughts of it they are induced to an imitation.

There are many alſo whoſe lives are very vitious, who yet have ſome amiable natural qualities: ſuch as Civility, Wit, Good-nature, Chearfulneſs, Beneficence, and Humanity. Theſe qualities, by aſſociating with the perſons whoſe they are, appear in a very ſtrong and engaging light. By this means theſe too often cover the deformity of their vices, throw a vail over them, and even ſecure a reconciliation with them. The ſoftneſs of a behaviour, an agreeable courteſy when it is continually beheld, makes the poyſon of the Example in other reſpects go eaſily down: a natural goodneſs of temper often fatally recommends a very bad practice to an aſſociate: from a pleaſure taken in the Man how eaſily do we proceed to an approbation of his vices, and from approving to imitating. The approbation of vice in this caſe may not be formal and diſtinct, but there is ſuch an undiſtinguiſhing liking taken

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in general to the Man, that his very vices are recommended too. The tacking ſome Ideas together in diſcourſe which ſurprize a little and annexing a laugh thereto, ſhall ſoften the great prophaneneſs and indecency of a diſcourſe, and for the ſake of the Wit it is much but we put up with the wickedneſs of it: nor is it unlikely, that from the pleaſure conveyed by the one, we ſhall mimick the other. Vice, when it is thus ſet off and accompanied, borrows a luſtre, at leaſt hides its own deformity, and the natural qualifications of the company inſenſibly convey the contagion of their converſation.

Again; many of the vitious pretend to be *advocates* for their practice, and they uſe great art and induſtry to recommend their way of life: they take a ſort of pride and pleaſure in making proſelytes. They will rally the principles of Education, and endeavour to work upon a natural ſhame to throw them off. They will tell us, that a fear of vice is nothing but prejudice and prepoſſeſſion, or that our ill opinion is entirely owing to our having never tryed it; whilſt at the ſame time they will boaſt of their hearts deſire, and with an air bleſs themſelves in their pleaſures and advantages. They will draw ſome tempting ſcenes, and ſet off their courſe with great flouriſh, adorning it with the characters and aſcribing to it all the preſent conſequences of virtue. Hereby things are ſuggeſted that would never otherwiſe have been thought on in favour of vice; a picture is given of it that would never have been ſeen in the tranſient view of it in the life: and

what perſon, eſpecially young ones, with warm paſſions is qualified from Education, reading, or thought, to ſee through the ſophiſtry or to detect the deluſion? At leaſt, how gladly will they catch at ſuch a repreſentation when held out to them in favour of what their inclination befriended too much before, and how much more reſolutely are they likely to engage, when, as they apprehend, vice hath ſo much more to ſay for itſelf than they ever imagined.

Thus doth converſe with the wicked ſet off vice to the beſt advantage, inducing favourable thoughts of it, in oppoſition to all that the word of God and the counſel of the beſt ſuggeſt, and very peculiarly by this means expoſes a perſon to tread in their ſteps and walk in their way.

SECT. IV.

3. THE rules and terms of friendſhip, which are generally thought decent to obſerve, influence greatly towards a reſemblance of minds and manners. It is a term of friendſhip, in general thought reaſonable, "That we accommodate and "ſuit our ſelves to our friends, that we endeavour to "be as civil and agreeable as we can." And when any are picked out as aſſociates, 'tis but natural to ſuppoſe there will be a *deſire* of appearing as agreeable to them as they are to us. From hence is that ſaying of one of the Fathers verified, "If perſons good and bad be joined together

" together in a ſpecial bond of Society, they " either quickly part, or they become alike." Now, ſuppoſing an intimacy with the vitious, how is it poſſible that the terms expected to be obſerved in friendſhips ſhould be kept to, without conforming to their general ſubjects of converſation, and to the practices of ſuch a Society? and what doth Experience tell us they are?

How often hath an *inward abhorrence* of ſome converſation and behaviour been ſmothered and ſuppreſſed for fear of becoming diſagreeable, or of being charged with a breach of good manners? This hath paved the way for ſomething further; and hereupon I may juſtly add, how frequently have ſome, of better minds and greater remains of virtue than the reſt, been led actually to join in thoſe things, at the commiſſion of which their hands have even trembled and their hearts aked? and this purely thro' fear of being accounted unſociable, of breaking company, or of being deſpiſed by their aſſociates. Demands of conformity are made upon the foot of Good-breeding and Civility, and whatever the diſcourſe or the practice on foot be, it is expected that all ſink to the level of the majority, upon pain of being charged with rudeneſs and ill-manners. And Oh! how hath reaſon, conſcience, fine ſenſe, and ſtrong Religious ſentiments yielded and been ſacrificed hereto! To diſſent, is interpreted to ſet up for being wiſer and better than the company: this is accounted a *Reflection*, and is treated as ſuch: inſomuch that if any perſons, how different ſoever in mind, taſte, and manners from the worſt, will aſſociate

with them, they muſt by the rules of ſuch Societies not only ſuppreſs their better thoughts and more virtuous conduct, but muſt ſink into a conformity to others, that they may be qualified for their company.

It may be ſaid indeed, that *no* rules of friendſhip oblige a perſon to run *all lengths* with his company. This is very true in it ſelf, and will be allowed in the caſe of *virtuous* friendſhips. But it is in vain to diſſemble it, That a deſire of the good opinion of our company is in a great degree inſeparable from our choice of it: and when this company is of a vitious kind, by what can we think to procure their good-liking, but by at leaſt an appearing reſemblance of minds and manners? Where there is not this, but a perſon ſhall remonſtrate and proteſt from time to time, what can he expect leſs than to be the BUT of their jeſts, and the object of their common ſcorn, which is not eaſy to bear, nor indeed is likely to be ventured when it is their good-liking that we ſeek. And tho' ſome who have aſſociated with the wicked have rationally and religiouſly proteſted and diſſented from ſome of their practices, yet this hath been ſeldom or never but *at firſt:* if they have continued their intimacy with ſuch, their remonſtrances and diſſent have ſoon been over; either from the torrent of ſneer and ſatyr they have been born down with, from the fear of being charged with ill-manners and ſpoiling company, or their own reconciliation to it. The uſual ground of ſuch intimacies will ſcarcely admit of a diſſent from their vices: for vice

vice itſelf in one ſhape or other is the general cement of ſuch a friendſhip; *conformity* therefore muſt be its maintenance and ſupport.

SECT. V.

4. THE ſtanding in the way of ſinners or aſſociating with them hath a very conſiderable influence upon our minds and manners as God is concerned in the matter. I am fully ſatisfied in my own mind, That there is not only a natural Providence which maintains and ſupports the general ſyſtem of Nature, and a Providence that directs and conducts temporal events amongſt Mankind, but that there is, if I may be allowed the term, a *Moral* Providence; by which I mean interpoſitions, influences, and aſſiſtances from God towards our improving our moral advantages, and our eſcaping the influence of thoſe ſnares to which we are unavoidably expoſed. I ſee nothing in this to claſh with any Divine perfection, nothing inconſiſtent with God's Government of reaſonable Beings, as free and accountable creatures; nor can I underſtand many paſſages of Scripture but upon the ſuppoſition of this as truth.

Now if we allow there are Divine interpoſitions and influences ſubſervient to our preſervation from the evils of unavoidable ſnares and temptations, then there is a foundation for this head, "That the cuſtomary aſſociating with "ſinners will moſt probably introduce a con-

" formity to them, as God may be concerned " in the matter." For, ſuch have no juſt ground to expect any Divine interpoſition in their favour, becauſe it is *running* into the very mouth of temptation and danger: it is a wilful expoſing of themſelves to hazard, and God may juſtly leave them to the immediate conſequences of it. Their behaviour is a great provocation: hopes and expectations of ſafety from any thing on God's part, in ſuch caſes, are not only vain but criminal, and may moſt righteouſly be anſwered by leaving them to themſelves. And how much good then may one wicked companion deſtroy? * How ſoon will a mind, however before furniſhed, be layed waſte and in ruins, when a perſon lies under the continual droppings of ſuch inſtructions, examples, and various ſolicitations, with the help of its own inclinations, and all Divine interpoſitions are withheld? 'Tis fond preſumption to expect any divine ſuccours when we knowingly and of choice go out of God's way; and as to ſuch company we may ſay, God is no otherwiſe there than *by his obſerving eye and diſpleaſed look*. And if thoſe influences, miniſtring by our own minds, or by any incidents towards our reſtraint and preſervation, are withheld, as indeed they are thereby *forfeited*, will not the evil Spirit that worketh in the children of diſobedience ſoon gain an eſtabliſhed Dominion? eſpecially where the means themſelves with which perſons are converſant, are in their nature adapted to hurry on to the utmoſt

* Eccles. ix. 18.

lengths

lengths of wickedneſs, as the ſtanding in the way of ſinners is adapted to do. Theſe things conſidered, I apprehend the wiſe man will be thought to ſpeak like himſelf when he declares, *That a companion of fools ſhall be deſtroyed* *.

SECT. VI.

BEFORE the Reader proceeds any farther, I would requeſt him to make a pauſe and ſeriouſly to reflect on the nature and conſequences of the thing I have been treating of. The thing I have been aiming at is to excite a Religious care as to the intimacies we contract, and the company that we keep. This, as far as I can judge, is of general uſe, and of as great importance in reſpect of our preſent and future happineſs as any thing we can employ our care about.

Experience and obſervation give ſufficient teſtimony, what waſte and deſolation in minds Company makes. What vice and vanity, which are terms pretty near akin, have by this means taken the place of very blooming promiſing excellencies? What hath been ſuggeſted already in this chapter, was deſigned to convince of the *peculiar* influence that friendſhips with the wicked have upon our minds and manners. I appeal to every ones reaſon, or experience, or obſervation, as they are qualified to judge by one or more of theſe ways, whether there is any one article to

* Prov. xiii. 20.

which

which more vice and miſery may be imputed than to this? All the ways of judging of the nature and tendency of things muſt fail us I think, or we muſt have lived in a very unthinking ſtate, if it is not matter of certainty with us, "That nothing more effectually lays the Ax to the "root of all the goodneſs that Education or other "advantages may lay the foundation of; nothing "makes a *quicker* diſpatch both of principle and "conſcience, or more *ſpeedily* finiſhes an abandon'd "miſerable creature." Let any foundation of Piety and Virtue be laid, I fear not to affirm, ſuch a friendſhip deſtroys it all, and in a very ſhort time too. And it is a ſtanding confirmation of this, that when the principles of Education or early impreſſions have ſat uneaſy upon perſons through the ſtrength of vitious inclinations, or have recoiled upon their gratifying them, they have immediately run to ſuch company as the moſt effectual expedient to rid themſelves of thoſe reſtraints, and to diveſt themſelves of *hated* truths.

It is certain, Man is a ſociable creature as he is a rational one, and it may be, the mind ſeldom unbends its ſelf with ſo much pleaſure as in the converſation of a ſuitable friend. Perfect ſolitude to ſuch a Being would turn a Paradiſe into a Deſart. But, might we not expect to find ſuch a Being uſing his reaſon in the choice of friendſhips and intimacies as faithfully as in any other affairs of life? Was it ever intended Mankind ſhould engage as the brutes run into herds, that is, aſſociate with the firſt they meet, if they

are but of the ſame ſpecies with themſelves? Or can this be reaſonable, wiſe, or ſafe? The Goſpel alſo requires Civility and Courteſy to all as a branch of its lovely temper; but can we not exerciſe this conſiſtently with a wiſe and rational diſtinction of perſons in our choice of intimates? Perſons may be over-run with and at laſt loſt by vices, which, we may ſay, are of their own growth, or which are not catched or copied from others; and theſe may haunt and rule them tho' they ſhould betake themſelves to a wilderneſs or cloyſter: But how great is the majority of thoſe who may and do lay their ruin upon their company? The broken hearts of wiſe and good Parents, the bitter lamentations of relatives, the bleeding ſympathy of friends over the multitude that are deſtroyed this way, ſetting out in the moſt promiſing manner, are a continual and pathetick plea for the greateſt care in this reſpect. Of the many unhappy creatures who die at a Gallows, moſt of whom thro' their vices are but a degree above the brutes in point of reflection, yet how few of theſe go out of the world, without declaring that their *company* hath had the principal influence in rendring them what they are, and in bringing them to their untimely end: and thoſe of them who have had the beſt education, and are of the beſt underſtanding, are moſt free and open in this acknowledgment. I ſee not, I confeſs, wherein it would be a reflection upon the wiſeſt and the beſt to admit their evidence, and to take their caution. Surely we ought to believe there is a Rock, and

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to dread it too, where we ſee ſo many wrecks! Amidſt the many ſcriptural warnings againſt iniquity, do we not in all of them hear a voice ſaying, *ſtand not in the way of Sinners?* For, we ſhould always remember, that a warning againſt the *end* is a warning againſt the *means*; and the obligation to regard the one infers equal obligation to regard the other. An indifferency or an undiſtinguiſhing behaviour in reſpect of our company, betrays great ignorance or great contempt of God and our immortal Souls, which by aſſociating with the wicked will infallibly grow. Wherever the fear of God is in any degree, and there is a ſincere deſire of having a converſation becoming the Goſpel, that is, where there is the loweſt degree of ſincerity, the congregation of evil doers will be hated *. And this which is an *evidence* of our goodneſs would be a conſiderable means to preſerve it. In ſhort, where the ſtanding in the way of Sinners is matter of *choice*, be the pretenſion what it will, farewel to wiſdom, peace, and ſafety, ſo far as Eternity is concerned in them: but, ſo far as we are *caſt* upon dangers of this kind by Providence in our ſituation, employment, or alliances, ſo far we may hope for preſervation, whilſt it is our governing ambition to be true to God, and to be faithful unto death. Whilſt we keep in his way, which is the way of duty, we may expect he will keep with us: and ſince herein lies a conſiderable part of our ſecurity, let us exerciſe that watchfulneſs as to this and every other ſnare as may

* Pſalm xxvi. 4, 5.

engage

engage our God with us, ſo as to preſerve us from the evil influence of every temptation in every ſtate, and lead us thro' life under the ſmiles of conſcience, and the joyful proſpect of a better world; where all are ONE as to friendſhip with God, and from thence, perfectly ſecure and happy one in another.

CHAP. III.

HOW obvious ſoever a little conſideration would render it, how certain ſoever conſtant experience proves it a truth, "That aſſociating with "ſinners hath a very great influence upon our re-"ſembling them in mind and manners;" yet inclination hath invented ſeveral pleas to countenance and defend the practice; which may alſo ſeem at firſt ſight to juſtify the running the hazard. From their plauſible appearance it is requiſite to take notice of them, and under each I ſhall endeavour to ſhew their fallacy and weakneſs.

SECT. I.

First Plea. SOME may ſay, by converſing freely with ſuch they have an opportunity of doing them good, of reproving them for and correcting thoſe things in them which are faulty and ſinful, and the ſtricter the friendſhip is, the more likely, ſay they, are we to prevail upon them.

Reply. It muſt be acknowledged, that doing good is one of the nobleſt ends that reaſonable creatures

tures can propoſe to themſelves: it is an end in perfect agreement with the general deſign of the moſt Perfect Being; and the doing it in that way which the Plea propoſes is in the trueſt manner to concur with the Saviour of the world, the great pattern our Religion propoſes to us, who went about reſcuing ſouls from the bondage of ſin and Satan, and therein from preſent and everlaſting miſery. And tho' we may not be finally ſucceſsful, yet when our fellow-creatures appear poſting to ruin, it is no ſmall ſervice to *check* them in their courſe.

But the Queſtion is, Whether the way to effect this or any further degree of good upon them is *by becoming companions and intimates of ſuch.* I apprehend it much otherwiſe. We may have ſufficient opportunity for this, if we are really diſpoſed to it, upon the foot of an *acquaintance* only. It is fit indeed they ſhould be convinced of our good will towards them, in order to the influence of what we ſay; and this they may be by a general concern to ſerve them in lower matters as we have opportunity. A refuſing an intimacy with them, inſtead of leſſening our capacity of ſerving them in the way the plea propoſes, will rather be a qualifying us for it. For, thereby they will ſee themſelves continually reproved, and our not aſſociating with them as *choſen* companions is in its nature adapted to work ſhame and confuſion in them. This is according to the Apoſtles rule, *If any man obey not our word, note that man.* How? *have no company with him that he may be aſhamed.* But to prevent extreams he adds, *Yet count him not as an enemy, but admoniſh*

niſh him as a brother *. He would not have them *fly all* converſe, or with-hold civil regards which might lead him into prejudice againſt them; but he at the ſame time remonſtrates againſt *an intimacy*, the refuſing which was likely to bring him to ſhame and amendment.

Indeed, they muſt be great ſtrangers to themſelves and to human nature, who know not that by intimacies with the licentious the beſt morals are greatly endangered; and that let a perſon commence a familiarity with ever ſo good a diſpoſition or view towards them, the ſober are far more likely to become converts to the licentious, than the licentious to become converts to Piety and Virtue. And when the virtuous are once gone over to their practice, the diſpoſition to do them good, as well as capacity for it is at a full end: there will be no heart to it; there can be no grace or propriety in it. So that by intimacies with ſuch, the opportunity for doing them good is more likely to be loſt than gained, and by the ſtrictneſs of the friendſhip there will be leſs diſpoſition to reprove from a familiarity with their extravagancies, or if they are rebuked they will leſs regard it, from one who hath rendred himſelf cheap and mean from *ſome* unjuſtifiable compliances with them, which he can hardly avoid.

* 2 Theſ. iii. 14.

SECT. II.

Second Plea. THERE are none, ſay others, ſo bad but I may get ſome good by them. I may improve my underſtanding, may learn a great deal of wiſdom, refine my way of thinking, or be better qualified for my own particular buſineſs and profeſſion. Theſe are univerſally allowed very commendable views; and is not a perſon juſtified in the proſecuting them?

Reply. Doubtleſs theſe are very laudable ends in themſelves, and a perſon is to be commended highly who hath propoſed them deliberately to himſelf; nay, 'tis very probable that ſome, whoſe lives are the moſt licentious, may be peculiarly capable of aſſiſting herein.

But let us conſider; are theſe things ſo valuable as to be purchaſed at *any rate?* If ſenſuality of mind and practice accompany learning, ingenuity, and a good underſtanding in our acquaintance, thoſe accompliſhments render them the more dangerous companions. We are not at firſt ſight aware what ſuch engaging qualities may ſerve to introduce or reconcile us to, when they are reſident with immoralities. It is very difficult for a perſon to frequent the Society of ſuch, or to chuſe an intimacy with great knowledge and great wickedneſs, and not to take down the one with the other. And what, I pray, can a perſon receive that ſhall be a compenſation for the loſs of his Piety and Virtue? Surely, more depends upon them than upon any thing elſe! And when they are gone, natural or acquired accompliſhments

compliſhments do but the more expoſe the ſinners unreaſonable courſe, and aggravate a final account? That perſon muſt have a very great value indeed for thoughts and words, who can riſque his Religion and Heaven for them; who can ſurrender them for the pleaſure of a fluent tongue, or exchange them for the entertainment or poſſeſſion of ingenuity. Would not reaſon bear us out if we ſhould ſay, "it is madneſs to ſacrifice innocency for any tree "of knowledge, or to give up a virtuous mind in "exchange for any ſcience or ſkill in the world." The odds between theſe are ſo great, that the perſon who riſques the former for the ſake of the latter may truly be ſaid, "to ſtake all againſt Nothing."

But beſides; are knowledge and other qualifications that entertain and improve ſo *confined*, that we can attain them no where but amongſt the licentious, and amongſt them no otherwiſe than by aſſociating continually with them? Cannot they be compaſſed more ſafely? Will not Religion and Ingenuity grow in the ſame ſoil; that perſons muſt needs herd with the Irreligious in order to their improvement and entertainment? Certainly *others* may be found out, from whom as much might be got one way without paying ſo dear for it another? But were it otherwiſe, as I am ſure it is not, if my advice were asked in that caſe, it ſhould be this; "let all go rather "than the wiſdom and pleaſures of Piety, the peace "and entertainment of a conſcious virtue: live in "ignorance rather than live and die in wickedneſs." We may adhere to it as a truth of equal evidence and importance with any we can learn from the moſt knowing, "That all the improvements, the

"in-

" intellectual or civil advantages we can compaſs in " an whole life, are bought by far too dear when " purchaſed with the loſs of Religion and Virtue." Were the advantages from ſuch company a thouſand times more than they are fancied to be, the time is near at hand, when they would all chearfully be given up for the recovery of that poſſeſſion and enjoyment of ourſelves that was bartered away for them. In truth, they are no way *fit* to be made intimates of by one who underſtands the dignity of his own nature, who demand the renouncing of preſent peace and future proſpects as the price of their acquaintance: for, what can they communicate that can be an equivalent? After all; the fear of the Lord *that* is wiſdom, and the departing from evil *that* is underſtanding *.

SECT. III.

Third Plea. THAT which is a ſnare to another may not be ſo to me: every perſon is not alike: there is a great variety and difference in the natural turn and diſpoſition of the mind, which renders that a temptation to one that is not ſo to another. For my part, may ſome ſay, I have converſed long with ſome of the worſt and have found no damage from it; and therefore in this caſe every one muſt judge for themſelves, and act as they find it with themſelves.

Reply. I readily allow this difference between ſome and others as to diſpoſition and the caſt of the mind, from whence ſome find little or no preſent inclination to, or preſent danger from being conver-

* Job xxviii. 28.

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ſant with ſome vices, by which others at the ſame time are carried away: outward circumſtances alſo may make this difference. But, have we not many inſtances of perſons being inſenſibly corrupted and drawn away, to length of converſe, into thoſe very vices againſt which they ſeemed ſtrongly guarded by nature, by which they ſeemed to have no diſpoſition, and to which, according to the plea, they for ſome time found no temptation? Have we not ſeen the natural diſpoſition ſtrangely alter? How hath a native modeſty been conquered, and a very unexpected boldneſs been introduced? How hath a native ſweetneſs and gentleneſs of mind been loſt, and an obſtinate ſtiffneſs and ſtubbornneſs taken its place? And this purely from the influence of company. Now as theſe diſpoſitions belonging to the natural frame were conſiderable preſervations from many vices, ſo they being loſt and their contraries taking place, a way is made for the admiſſion of thoſe vices, however oppoſite they might have been to the former turn of their minds: and from hence, thoſe things become temptations which before were none.——But if any ſhould ſtill perſiſt in it as fact, that they have kept up an intimacy with the vitious, and have found no damage from it, I have theſe two things to ſay in reply, which I think deſerve to be conſidered.

I. It is very probable ſuch are not ſo ſenſible of hurt or damage in this reſpect as they ought, nor have been ſo careful in their obſervation of themſelves as they ſhould. The point is, "What do "they call damage?" I here ſuppoſe the perſon thus pleading to deſire the Character of a Religious perſon. And upon this ſuppoſition I would entreat

ſuch impartially to reflect and obſerve, whether this company of theirs from whence, as they ſay, they have ſuſtained *no hurt*, hath not greatly impaired their ſerioufneſs and their regard to God and Religion? Hath it not brought them to a great indifferency about their duty, whether they diſcharge or omit it, and introduced a general neglect of their conduct, as far as the laws of God are concerned? Have they not by that means loſt much of the tenderneſs of their conſciences, and become reconciled to many things that they once *juſtly* ſtartled at? Do not theſe now live very much by rote and cuſtom who once lived by rule; conſulting the pleaſant and unpleaſant, the profitable and unprofitable for this world in their actions, inſtead of the good and evil of them as once they did? Once more; is not the Religion that they have, juſt of that form which the *chance* of converſation and company gives it, and juſt to the degree which that permits. If the caſe be thus, I muſt beg leave to ſay, whatever *their* ſentiments are, they have ſuſtained great damage; and tho' they may not yet have been partners with others in their *diſgraceful* vices, they are in a fair way for it. To hint a parallel caſe as to this world. Every wiſe and thinking perſon will allow, *that* company had done a man a great deal of miſchief, that had made him idle and quite indifferent to his buſineſs, or whether he went forward or backward in the world, tho' it had not yet brought him into any of the *expenſive* vices. For every one I believe can ſee the natural connection between theſe, and that tho' the perſon was not yet extravagant in common eſtimate, he could not be long otherwiſe. In

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like manner, a very ſlender regard to a Divine Being, indifferency and careleſsneſs as to our behaviour, the loſs of fear as to ſin and temptation are as truly a degeneracy from a ſtate of Religion, and the high-road to ſcandalous vices, as a neglect to buſineſs is the road to poverty, and to the expenſive vices of lewdneſs and drunkenneſs. If perſons therefore will not account theſe alterations in themſelves, a conſiderable damage in their Religious Character, which I think are *inſeparable* from vitious company, they muſt excuſe thoſe who impute it to the impairment of their underſtandings, as well as to the loſs of their heart and affections.

II. If ſuch have ſtood in the way of ſinners, and have not been really injured by being drawn to an imitation of their vices, they ought to look upon themſelves much indebted to the divine interpoſal and influence. I think it would be juſt and beneficial to look upon it in this light. Now what is the leſſon that this teaches? Surely this, " Do not treſ-
" paſs too far, nor plead your ſafety hitherto as an
" argument for proceeding." If God hath, as our Bleſſed Lord hath taught us all to pray that we might be, delivered from the evil, from the miſchiefs and ſins that ſuch company would lead to, yet their ſecurity may moſt righteouſly be withdrawn by their *continuing to run* into temptation. For in ſuch a caſe, that petition " to be delivered from
" the evil," is downright mockery. Whatever inclination may plead, we are not at liberty in this matter. For, if we have not, under intimacies with the vitious been yet led to an imitation of their *enormities*, we muſt have ſuſtained conſiderable damage,

and contracted that which paves the way to them, or which, if not remedied, will iſſue in ſomething as fatal for Eternity: and we have the greateſt reaſon to believe, that whatever was our ſecurity hitherto from their ſcandalous vices, will by the *continuance* of ſuch an intimacy fail us, and that we ſhall reſemble them in thoſe articles which we at preſent deteſt.

SECT. IV.

Fourth Plea. IF I converſe not equally with all as they fall in my way, they will ſay I am moroſe and ſour; and if I pretend Religion or plead that againſt ſuch a friendſhip, Religion will ſadly ſuffer; for they will impute all the moroſeneſs and churliſhneſs to that.

Reply. In order to ſhew the weakneſs of this let what I have already ſaid be recollected; that I am not ſpeaking againſt civility, courteſy, nor a beneficence towards the worſt, as opportunity offers, nor conſequently againſt that eaſineſs and freedom in converſation which theſe imply, as we accidentally fall into the company of the vitious; but only againſt *choſen friendſhips* and *indulged intimacies*. It is alſo a very laudable care to do what we can that Religion be not evil ſpoken of by our means, and particularly that it be not brought under that unjuſt brand of unſociableneſs, ſourneſs, and ill-nature, to which its nature and influence is as oppoſite as light to darkneſs. But, this can be no further our duty than is conſiſtent with other branches of duty: for, we have this ſtanding rule, "Not to do evil

" that good may come." Now, none can walk circumſpectly or by the rules of the Goſpel, but their behaviour is liable to be branded with ſome term of reproach, and thereby their Chriſtianity expoſed to a reflection by thoſe who walk in the way of their own hearts, and as ſeemeth good in their own eyes. The queſtion therefore is, whether the reproaches are *juſt*; and if they be unjuſt, whether we ſhould run an apparent hazard of our eternal happineſs to avoid them. Put the caſe before us, of a perſon profeſſing great regard to Religion becoming an intimate aſſociate of the vitious. It is not ſuppoſable but ſome things would be ſtarted or propoſed, that muſt be very abhorrent and ſhocking to his better ſentiments and more tender mind, if he is what he pretends to be. Should he expreſs his diſlike and enter his proteſt againſt this, it is great odds but his Conſcience and his Religion will have ſome hard name given it: what way then hath he left to avoid theſe reproaches both of himſelf and Religion, but an *entire* conformity to ſuch company: but would this do? No, far from it: for if thoſe who profeſs a great regard to Religion ſhould run the lengths of thoſe who have diſcarded it, it is well known, Religion would ſoon have a worſe brand than moroſeneſs, and they a worſe Character than ſour or churliſh. From conſtant experience it is found, that the compliances of the profeſſedly Religious with the vitious practices of others, which from intimacies can hardly be avoided, have, as by authority, ſubjected all pretenſions to Religion to the brand of hypocriſy, and have led their very Sollicitors and Tempters to evil, when once they have prevailed, to

charge their profeſſion with being no more than a pretence to commit, or a cloak to cover, the worſt of practices.

It is the greateſt abſurdity therefore to contract *intimacies* with the vitious, (as the plea muſt imply if it is any plea at all for what I have been condemning) in order to *prevent* reflections on Religion: ſince daily experience tells us, that is the way beyond all others to load it therewith: and ſuch a one as it hath ſuffered infinitely more from than from any others. Suppoſe then, that a perſon be termed moroſe and ſour for refuſing ſuch friendſhips, and it be imputed to his Religion, as doubtleſs true Religion will ever lead to ſuch a refuſal; he is no way criminal herein; it is an offence taken and not given: it cannot be required of us to purchaſe a good word for Religion in general, at the imminent hazard of our own in particular. If any will ſtile a fear of offending our Maker, Superſtition; a care of our immortal Souls, Preciſeneſs and Humour; and an abhorrence of evil, Ill-nature; they muſt: but we ſhould be egregious fools not to be *obſtinate* in this Superſtition, Humour, and Ill-nature: and Religion would ſuffer infinitely more by our avoiding theſe thro' intimacies with, and an almoſt *unavoidable* conformity to ſuch revilers in any really vitious practices, than it can poſſibly do by any of *their* reflections.

This plea indeed can be nothing but weakneſs or pretence: and I fear that when ſuch *mention* a regard to Religion they *mean* themſelves; when they *talk* of reſcuing that from cenſure, they only *mean* their own gratification and eſcaping perſonal cenſures.

ſures. It looks to be more a dictate of Vice than Religion.—No; if the ſhunning ſuch intimacies be moroſeneſs, ſuperſtition, or any other hard thing which they will pleaſe to ſtile it, let us be more ſo: for to this concluſion we may come, and may moſt reaſonably abide by it, "Religion needs none of "theſe recommendations or ſupports; reproaches "can never be probably avoided by friendſhips "with the vitious, but upon our going *all* their "lengths; and if we do, it is great odds but they "will be the firſt that ſhall reproach for that con-"formity." This every one muſt ſee is infinitely harder to bear, than any we can ſuſtain for ſhunning their friendſhip, ſince it will be ſeconded by conſcience; and the ſting of every reproach lies in its juſtice and truth.

SECT. V.

VITIOUS friendſhips appearing ſo dangerous, and ſo entirely without plea and defence, as I hope they do to thoſe who have carefully read ſo far, I truſt it will not be unacceptable to thoſe who are convinced thereof, if I ſubjoin ſome advices which may be ſerviceable to all either for preſervation or recovery from them.

From a natural inſtinct we go into friendſhips and intimacies, and, as I have allowed, there is hardly any circumſtances wherein the mind ſo agreeably unbends itſelf, as in the converſation of a well-choſen friend. But ſince by careleſſneſs or a wrong-turned mind our greateſt pleaſures and benefits may become miſchiefs, I would ſuggeſt a few things

things for our more ſafe converſe and familiarity with others: which, if Good, are of the greater conſequence, as our company hath ſo conſiderable an influence upon our minds and practice.

Firſt Advice. Let us carefully ſee to the general ſtate and turn of our *own* minds; that it be prevailingly good and holy. It then may be ſtiled ſo, when we have an inward abhorrence of iniquity and vice, and a ſettled reliſh and love to Piety and goodneſs. Our ſecurity as to all the ſnares of converſation lies very conſiderably in the ſettled temper and diſpoſition of our own minds towards the ways of righteouſneſs and life. Unleſs that be good, we may ſay, humanly ſpeaking, it is pure accident or chance if a perſon comes not out of *common* converſation the worſe for it: but when our own minds are complectionally good in reſpect of their diſpoſitions, it is an antidote like an excellent conſtitution in the time of a common contagion. They will then lay hold of the good that is offered, improving it and will be improved by it: they will feel a ſhock upon every appearance of evil, and an increaſe of their abhorence from thence; be more quick at diſcerning any thing that looks that way, and meet it with a proper check and indignation. *To be out of the way of temptation* is a great advantage, but not equal to a heart fully ſet againſt all evil, and in love with goodneſs. It would conſiderably promote ſuch a ſettled good diſpoſition would we but frequently and deliberately conſider the unreaſonableneſs, diſingenuity, and danger of vice; would we but ſet it before ourſelves as an offence againſt the higheſt and

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beſt Being, moſt unbecoming ourſelves as we are reaſonable, and directly repugnant to our own intereſt as we are deſignedly immortal. Let us alſo to this end conſcientiouſly and ſtatedly engage in thoſe exerciſes of Piety, which in their nature tend to plant and improve the fear of God and a regard to him at all times: this hath a direct influence upon habitual goodneſs and holineſs, by deſtroying our love of ſin which is its ſtrength, by ſecuring the aid of divine grace, and letting us into pleaſures and advantages far ſuperior to what vice can propoſe. And let us depend upon this ſo far as to make the experiment, "That the more of the mind "and heart there is in theſe exerciſes, the more "their benefit this way will be experienced."

Second Advice. Let us exerciſe a conſtant watch over our particular temper, and guard againſt the particular ſnares that may expoſe us to. We muſt be great ſtrangers to ourſelves not to know what it is: and as that hath a conſiderable influence in the choice of our company, for we generally ſort with thoſe who ſuit ourſelves in that, ſo from their ſuitableneſs to us they have the greater aſcendency over us to betray us into extreams, and if vitious, they will certainly make an advantage of it.

Every kind of natural temper hath its advantages and diſadvantages in reſpect of Religion. The lively and chearful, when the mind is ſet right to God and goodneſs, are capable of more active ſervice than others: but then on the other hand, they are expoſed to levity, and froth, and to what comes with the alluring face of pleaſure. The ſweet, civil, and gentle diſpoſition, when accompanied

nied with Religion, is retained generally by the ſtrongeſt principle of Religion, Love, Gratitude, and every thing that is generous: but this alſo expoſes greatly to a conformity to the company it is in: it renders it very difficult to deny or practically to diſſent even when it diſapproves, and endangers the ſacrificing conſcience to apprehended forms of Civility. It muſt therefore be of the greateſt ſervice to us, to carry about us a lively ſenſe of our prevailing caſt and turn of mind; to abſtain as much as poſſible from all ſuch company as we know will prey upon our weakneſs, will put our temper to the teſt, or make an advantage of it for ſinful compliances. I think the lively and chearful ſhould be much upon their guard in that company, where nothing but pleaſure and mirth is propoſed: the civil, affable, and obliging diſpoſition ſhould never but by neceſſity frequent that company, where it knows it ſhall frequently be put to the difficulty of ſaying, No; or of denying, in order to preſerve its virtue and innocency. In every company let us attend to our own temper, that it run us not into extreams with others, and let us Religiouſly ſhun that company, which we have found to make an advantage of our diſpoſition for a conformity to vitious practices.

Third Advice. Let us place all honour and happineſs in what will ſecure us the approbation of God, and the teſtimony of our own conſciences; or, make that the ſtandard of what is truly honourable and felicitating. Every principle that is a natural motive to goodneſs ought to be encouraged; but there is nothing more pernicious than miſtakes

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as to principles of action. Applauſes and Characters from men have been moſt ſucceſsful inducements to ſurrender reaſon and conſcience, to betray into an univerſal conformity to company. It was the free declaration of one who bore the title of Nobility, not leſs remarkable for his free accuſations of himſelf under his ſickneſs, than for the bold impieties of his health, "that he was influenced "to his extravagant language and his formal de- "fences of Atheiſm by the affectation of being the "Firſt-Wit; and that he was led on in that courſe "from time to time by the applauſes of his com- "pany, tho' under bitter and reproachful exclama- "tions againſt himſelf, when alone." Indeed, when honour and happineſs is thus placed it quickly defeats its own end, and the reſult is infamy and diſgrace. Let a perſon place his felicity in the opinion of the world, and ultimately ſeek the honour that comes from thence, he muſt as a means to his end accommodate his behaviour to their taſte, and govern it by their maxims. He muſt ſtudy to do what is pleaſing to the world, and whoever doth ſo, muſt in many caſes diſpleaſe himſelf and God too, by doing what is really diſhonourable. And what doth the applauſes of a croud ſignify, when a man is in diſgrace with himſelf? What is reputation abroad, when a man hath none at home or with himſelf? It is very hard, if poſſible, to be this way honourable and virtuous at the ſame time; for ſuch applauſes are too commonly founded on reſemblance of practice, and that none of the beſt, and lead thoſe who affect them *as*

their happineſs to live by cuſtom and common example.

Let us endeavour then to ſet our underſtandings right in this matter, that we may not be miſled by popular but empty ſounds. Reputation and Honour are grateful to human nature, and are to be valued for the opportunity they ſometimes give for uſefulneſs: but then, their value and worth abundantly vary according to the quarter from whence they come. The applauſes of the idiot or ignorant are juſtly deemed contemptible from their inability to judge of excellencies, or to diſtinguiſh between them and their contraries: the applauſes of the vitious are chiefly ſcandals and reflections from a ſuppoſed reſemblance of themſelves: none but the wiſe and virtuous have any honour to *give*, and that is only to be *taken* as conſcience ſeconds it. Now, when, from this way of eſtimating, our hearts are ſet upon the honour and happineſs flowing from the approbation of God, who only can make a right judgment of us and eſteem us according to our real merit, we are in a fair way of converſing more ſafely with others. Vitious examples then will want their chief motive; we ſhall neither fear the cenſures of the wicked, nor ſeek their applauſe; we ſhall find it much more eaſy to leave others where we think they leave God; and feel a warm reſentment againſt every indignity offered to him, by whom we covet to be honoured, and from whom we hope to be happy: we ſhall then be free to follow conſcience *againſt* cuſtom and company; our principle of honour will be *with* conſcience, and we ſhall covet nothing from the world

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but what we can obtain with the approbation of God, and a well-done from our own hearts.

Fourth Advice. Truſt to *no* Company ſo far as to indulge a ſecurity. As to what generally goes under the name of *Good* company, it is frequently termed ſo from what would not recommend it to a wiſe and good perſon. But when we do aſſociate in a friendly way with thoſe of a character for ſobriety and a regard to God, let us not in confidence of ſafety give a looſe to our temper, or be off our guard. The beſt of perſons are not our rule; for ſuch may be guilty of indiſcretions very little different from vice, and of carrying lawful matters too far. One may propoſe, and another, from the general good character of the propoſer, may implicitly conſent to what is in itſelf of no good report, and of a very evil tendency. In whatever company therefore we are, let us maintain our watch, and judge of preſidents and actions, not by the character of the perſons, but by the nature of the actions, and the denomination they have in the Goſpel of Chriſt. I fear indeed, if we go by this rule, we ſhall be obliged to ſtop ſhort of the lengths that many run, who wear the general character of ſobriety, and to enter a proteſt againſt the conduct of many as walking diſorderly, who flatter themſelves that theirs is only Chriſtian liberty. But *for this very end* I have laid down this Advice: duty and ſafety make it neceſſary. Abſolutely to truſt or give up ourſelves to the conduct of *any* company or ſociety, is running a very great riſque: none are thus to be truſted in be their character what it will. If

one, preſuming upon abſolute ſafety from his company, ſhall give temper or inclination a looſe, others for the ſame reaſon will probably fall in therewith, and thereby folly and ſin too may inſenſibly circulate. On the contrary, would every one in ſocieties and in company of the beſt character, but be upon their guard againſt the approaches to vice, they might jointly contribute to each other's pleaſure and ſafety.

Fifth Advice. Statedly reflect on what hath paſſed in company, and judge of it by the common ſtandard of life and rule of judgment. In the heat and pleaſure of converſation many things paſs unattended to, which probably a calm reflection would give us a very different ſentiment of, from what we had at the time. When our converſation ſtatedly undergoes a ſcrutiny from our ſelves, we are in the way to rectify former errors, which otherwiſe may be repeated from time to time till they become habitual, and the evil of them is entirely overlooked: and a conſciouſneſs of this our practice will render us more careful when in company, not to lead or join in any fooliſh talking and jeſting which is not convenient, or becoming Chriſtians *: Such as defiles the mind, intrenches upon the honour of God, or detracts from the veneration due to things ſacred. Theſe things may be unheeded at the time, but reflection would ſhew us their deformity: and if we are deſirous of avoiding vice or what hath an affinity thereto, and of converſing innocently and ſafely, we ſhould ſtated-

* Eph. v. iv.

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ly review what hath paſſed in company in the calm and retirement of our own minds.

Sixth Advice. Let us check and keep a ſtrict rein upon our inclination to company, that it gain not an aſcendency, and introduce the natural and various miſchiefs of its exceſs. This is as capable of exceſs as any other inclination, it is as often found in its exceſs, and is attended with as fatal conſequences. I fear many a ſingle perſon and family too may lay their ruin in every ſenſe, to what we uſually ſtile *Company-keeping*. The mind and heart is undoubtedly engaged too far this way, when it breaks in upon the hours of buſineſs, when the calling is neglected for its ſake, when retirement is rendered a burden, or when all leiſure hours are melted down this way.

Such indeed may ſay, "They always take care "that their company is good." But to this I muſt beg leave to reply, "Let the company be what it "will, ſuch a love and addictedneſs thereto cannot "be good." It is a very unreaſonable and inordinate prevalency, and introductive to the greateſt miſchiefs as to both worlds. All that know what real Religion is, and to whom the Goſpel of Jeſus allows the character and hopes of the Religious, know alſo that it is not eaſy to ſecure and maintain the diſtinguiſhing character of a Chriſtian with all their care, watchfulneſs, and improvement of opportunities to that end. What is *their* title to a Chriſtian character then likely to be, over whom company hath this aſcendency? What are its natural effects? Why, obſerve it where you pleaſe you will find, that where perſons have this unreaſon-

able *itch*, to give it its beſt title, of *converſation* with others, that they have neither opportunity nor inclination, time or heart, to converſe with themſelves: they are ſtrangers at home till they dare not return, their own thoughts and reflections being ſome of the worſt company. From hence they derive ſuch a levity and frothyneſs that they cannot admit a ſerious thought, and through a contracted incapacity and diſlike of themſelves they are averſe to reflection. A paſs, by this means, is opened to the mind for any thing to enter, and a total diſinclination to recollection takes place, ſo that they cannot fix on any ſubject of a Religious nature to check an inclination, to correct any ill impreſſions that have been made, nor riſe to any great, Ideas how much ſoever they deſerve their attention, or how neceſſary ſoever to their reformation or improvement. The cloſet becomes hateful, nor know they how to employ themſelves when there: every thing is burdenſome that is out of their circle of empty pleaſures, and every thing grows above them that is above amuſement. If long obſervation and variety of teſtimonies do not fail me, I am very certain, "That "we may as well expect to accompliſh any end "without the uſe of natural means, as to be truly "Religious without frequent retirement."

Permit me therefore to preſs it upon all who take this into their hands, eſpecially upon younger perſons, who are making their way, as it is uſually phraſed, into the world, that they guard againſt ſuch an inordinate love of company. Suffer not your ſelves to be *betrayed* into it: remember it is capable

pable of exceſs, it is eaſy to run into that exceſs, and then it is attended with as miſchievous conſequences as can well be imagined. The firſt inducement, I will ſuppoſe, is *good-company*; but let me tell you, without a reſtraint upon this inclination, you will ſoon loſe your *firſt* taſte by which you chooſe your *firſt* aſſociates: *any thing* at length will do *if it be but company*, and you will become as undiſtinguiſhing in your reliſhes, as you are undiſtinguiſhed in your morals. —I beg leave to add, That the more I know and obſerve the world, the more aſtoniſhed I am at ſome ways of Education into which many, called Parents, run. I mean, the leading and introducing children into all *manner* of company before they have any ballaſt of their own, before they can in any degree diſtinguiſh between truth and falſhood, ſhadow and ſubſtance, or between what *is* done, and what *ought* to be done. This I know is gloſſed over with the term of *their knowing the world*. —But I would ask, what occaſion is there for this knowledge? I would ſuppoſe that no *Parents* intend to *teach* their Children vice; on the contrary, that they propoſe amiable and uſeful qualifications by this means. But let me ask, cannot they be wiſe without having vanity and folly playing upon their ſenſes, at a time too when one may ſay *they* are nothing but ſenſe and imagination? Cannot they be led into juſt apprehenſions of what is right and good, without being familiar with evil? May they not have a ſufficient knowledge of the world to anſwer all the ends of their being ſent into it, without being converſant with the worſt ſcenes in it? With as much reaſon might it be ſaid, however homely

homely the compariſon be, that a perſon could not know the world literally, or as a ſyſtem, if he was unacquainted with the dunghils. Why muſt they be Eye and Ear-witneſſes of all the varieties and forms of vanity and vice? Do ſuch Parents know any thing of the world themſelves, and not know that thoſe things grow up ſo naturally of themſelves, that they don't need to be watered and cultivated by ſuch pains and expence? I would ask but one queſtion more; do ſuch Parents propoſe this knowledge of their children *in order to practice?* I own then the means is very apt, and they bid very fair for ſucceſs; nay, I will defy them with all their authority and skill to *prevent* their being of the ſame ſtamp with the world, or the vain and vitious part of it, to the knowledge of which they ſo induſtriouſly introduce them; and if the miſery of their children both here and hereafter will break their hearts, they bid fair for it, and are richly entitled to it.—God help ſuch poor young ones! if this be Education, neglect were more deſirable! ——

As the reſult of this Chapter, may it be our care to poſſeſs our minds with the deepeſt ſenſe of the All-knowing God, who is not only acquainted with our private hidden life, our ſecret haunts and company, but alſo with our *real* views and ends, our motives and deſigns, amidſt all our *pretended* reaſons for our aſſociating as we do: Let this thought be familiar, and then it is likely to have its efficacy. May we exerciſe a daily care, and by daily prayer engage the Divine aid againſt the inſinuations and influences of wicked examples; and let us remember our prayers, "that we give not the lie to them by running

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" ning ourſelves into temptation." If any ſhould take up this who have been carried away by wicked companions, and who continue to ſtand in their way, I would entreat them to remember, that their preſent courſe binds them down to be partners in their plagues as well as their pleaſures: for with them, if you perſiſt, will your ſouls be gathered at laſt. You cannot have the hope, whatever your preſumptions are, of dying the death of the righteous, when you have lived with the wicked. The converſation of the wicked is an education for Hell; and they are ſurely in great danger, who are found amongſt ſuch as by their ſpirits and courſe are marked for vengeance. The wicked cannot upon the whole be *friends* here, tho' they may be aſſociates; and the greater aſſociates here, the worſe partners hereafter. May ſuch who have hitherto eſcaped this and every ſuch ſnare, from ſouls full of pity to the wicked as the moſt miſerable, uſe their beſt endeavours for their conviction and recovery; and, by an improvement in goodneſs, may they live under the pleaſing proſpect of being one day adjoined to a bleſſed Society, uncapable of ſinning or of tempting: Spirits pure and happy: pure, according to the perfection of that glorious ſtate the Goſpel delineates and enſures, and happy, beyond all poſſibility of influence from the mixtures and changes of this.

CHAP. IV.

THE laſt ſtage of vice, as the Pſalmiſt hath enumerated and ranged them is, " The ſitting " in the ſeat of the ſcornful." The expreſſion itſelf ſufficiently proves this cannot *ſuddenly* be the character of any: it muſt generally be the effect of time and toil too, ſince there is ſo much in nature itſelf, bad as it is, that muſt be ſtruggled with and ſubdued, before ever a perſon can ſit down in ſuch a ſeat, or give up himſelf to ſuch a ſociety and practice as the ſcorners is. But, to this each of the foregoing ſteps paves the way. Seldom ſhall we find perſons of looſe and wicked principles, which was the firſt ſtep, who are not alſo looſe and vitious in their morals; theſe naturally diſpoſe them to aſſociate with thoſe like themſelves, which was the ſecond ſtep; from hence they are eaſily led, and have but a little way to go to the ſeat of the ſcornful, or to ſettle amongſt ſuch, to join with them in their ſcorning as their cuſtomary practice. The connection of theſe things in their own nature is very evident, when they are attended to, how hard ſoever it be to convince thoſe of the firſt ſtage that they are in great danger of the laſt. From the hard'ning influence of vitious company, indulgence to appetite and inclination becomes more reſolute and habitual: this naturally prompts to a proportionable oppoſition to the principles of Religion and dictates of conſcience, nay indeed renders it neceſſary, ſince at times theſe muſt check and diſturb them in their courſe; and

and nothing doth ſo effectually prevent all diſturbances from them, as the ridiculing, or turning them into deriſion and a jeſt. When perſons can thus commence ſcoffers, the work is done at once; and as the other ſteps prepare the way to this, ſo when they have arrived at this, the character and practice as vitious is finiſhed and compleated.——It may be proper here,

I. To enquire who theſe ſcorners are, or who are repreſented under that character.

II. To examine the ground and foundation of their principles and practice.

III. To ſhew the weakneſs and inſufficiency of their pleas for this their practice, or which are uſually made the reaſons and occaſions hereof.

SECT. I.

LET us firſt enquire who theſe ſcorners are, or who are repreſented under this character. And from what I can collect from the paſſages where they are mentioned, they ſeem ſuch as had diveſted themſelves of good principles, and acted under the influence of bad ones. Such as had brought themſelves to deride and mock at both the principles and practice of Religion, as the contrivances of the Crafty and Deſigning, or the dreams and fancies of the Melancholy: invented to keep the herd of Mankind in order, that the inventors might more eaſily manage them, and make their earnings of them. Nor was this only matter of private opinion, but they in great kindneſs endeavoured to free the world

from thoſe enſlaving ſentiments of Religion and Virtue, Good and Evil, with their imaginary foundations and conſequences. The method they take for the accompliſhment of this, is to *laugh at* all ties from or regards to Divine Providence, the immortality of the ſoul, the dictates or terrors of conſcience, or the expectations of a future judgment. Theſe are openly treated as fables and impoſtures, and of courſe every action or argument grounded on them is turned into ridicule. They themſelves avoid every act that hath the ſolemnity of Religion in it, and the very appearances of a regard to Religion in others are treated as hypocriſy or deſign. If others ſcruple any act as evil to which inclination or intereſt invites, they treat it as errant folly; and all acts of Devotion, all regards to Divine inſtitutions are ſcorned as the groundleſs prejudices of Education, or a ſtupid ſlavery to empty forms: they inſult over a fear of a Divine Being as childiſh timorouſneſs, and deride all other rewards and puniſhments of actions, beſides *preſent* good and bad conſequences. Thus they attempt to run down all Religion both in the principle and the practice, and to laugh it out of countenance. From this deriding ſcorning humour, they guard themſelves againſt the reproofs of the Pious by contemning them, and fortify themſelves againſt all amendment by ſcoffing at the means of reclaiming them. In the language of Scripture this term of Scorners or Mockers deſcribes the very worſt of Men; ſuch whoſe faith is ſhip-wracked, whoſe very minds are corrupted, whoſe conſciences are ſeared, who are entirely governed by their ſenſes, humours, and paſſions, and from a devotedneſs to

vice are malignantly ſet againſt all thought and evidence, excepting what feeds their humour and befriends their prejudices againſt Religion. It's plain, from the frequent rebukes given to theſe ſort of perſons, that there were many of this tribe in ancient times: our experience tells us they are not extinct, but on the contrary their number daily grows. That a behaviour ſo extraordinary, when conſidered in itſelf, ſhould be altogether unreaſonable and without foundation, yea *againſt* the moſt ſelf-evident principles of reaſon, it may be will not be preſently allowed. It is therefore neceſſary and may be uſeful,

SECT. II.

SECONDLY. To ſet this Character and practice of the ſcorner more fully to view. In order to this I ſhall proceed gradually, deſiring the following particulars may be conſidered and put together. —— 1. The principles of Religion, if true, are of all other truths of the moſt importance and concern to us. The principles I am ſpeaking of are theſe. — The exiſtence of an Almighty, perfectly Holy, Juſt, Wiſe, and Good Being, from whom all other Beings are derived, from whom all receive their ſupports, upon whom all are abſolutely dependents for happineſs. — That this Being is the Governour of the world, directs and diſpoſes of all things, even the particular affairs of individuals; he ſees and regards our behaviour, and is pleaſed or diſpleaſed with us according to our actions. — Tho' this body of ours is ſubjected to death and diſſolution, yet the principal part of our compoſition is not liable

liable to its arreſt, but is deſigned and capacitated for another ſtate of exiſtence, capable of pleaſure or pain in the ſtate of ſeparation, and ſhall actually experience the one or the other in a degree beyond all its preſent conceptions, according to what the courſe of life in this bodily ſtate hath been, either good or bad. —Tho' the body by the decree of Heaven muſt die and ſee corruption, yet it ſhall be raiſed again and re-united to the ſoul, at a day appointed for an univerſal Judgment; when the happineſs or miſery of every individual ſhall be perfected, and the ſentence ſhall be governed by the conformity or diſconformity of the individuals to the laws God hath given them to obſerve, and their improvement or non-improvement of the advantages he hath beſtowed upon them. Theſe things I ſay, if true, are of the greateſt importance to us of any in the world from their very nature. I do not think there is a Scorner, who hath any underſtanding left, but, upon the ſuppoſed truth of theſe things, will allow " that nothing more con-" cerning can enter into the heart of man." Well then, may we not demand their allowing theſe things to be merely *poſſible?* They muſt be ſo, if they carry no contradiction in them. Now upon the *bare poſſibility* of their truth, can any thing be more abſurd and wild than ſcorning, playing, and jeſting with them; than deriding thoſe who profeſs to regard them, and who really eſteem them as truths wherein they are concerned beyond every thing elſe? Surely ſuch things, attended with a bare poſſibility of their being true, demand and deſerve a fair trial by reaſon; ſince they are ſo adapted to the comfort and well-being of intelligent creatures,

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and muſt, if true, entail ſuch ſhocking conſequences upon the ſcoffer. Certainly they are not at once to be hiſſed off the ſtage, or trampled on upon the bare propoſal. What reaſonable perſon could mock at principles of ſuch weight without examining their grounds, without enquiring ſoberly into them, debating the matter with that gravity which the importance of the ſubject requires? Or who of that Character but would renew their enquiries, examine again and again, ſuppoſing they were not ſatisfied of the truth of theſe principles, becauſe of their vaſt importance "if they ſhould be true." — But ſome may ſay, "they have conſidered and "weighed them, and upon trial they are found as "light as vanity; they do not find they have evi-"dence to ſupport them." Suppoſing this to be fact as to any, yet their *ſcorning* is moſt unreaſonable and indefenſible upon this circumſtance. For,

2. There is a poſſibility they may be true notwithſtanding their enquiries. The evidences of theſe things are ſo ſtrong, ſince they were intended to be the foundation of a Religious practice, that without a breach of charity I may ſay, "the ſcorner's "enquiries have been very ſlight, very partial, and "his concluſion very haſty. Nay, that inclination "hath had a greater hand in forming it than rea-"ſon." But, allowing that they have made enquiry, and can ſee no evidence ſufficient to convince them, what is the concluſion they can *juſtly* draw? Certainly they can go no further than this, theſe things *may* not be true; they can conclude only with a May-be. Now if they only *may not* be true, they alſo *may* be true: if there is but a poſſibility on

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their ſide, there is a poſſibility againſt them. But who, except a diſtracted perſon, could venture to ſcorn and deride ſuch truths, when they themſelves muſt own there is a poſſibility of their truth? Nothing can juſtify ſuch a treatment of matters, ſo weighty in their nature and conſequences if true, but the being able to prove them "abſolutely impoſſi-"ble;" which no creature, that I have heard of, hath been hardy enough to undertake. Have theſe perſons enquired into the foundation of theſe principles? But, have they at the ſame time been ſo free from prejudices as to be capable of diſcerning what foundation they had? Have they ſet themſelves to the work with a deſire of being convinced if they could? Have they given every thing its due weight that hath made againſt them, as well as what hath made for them? I muſt ſay, their very *ſcorning* is a juſt ground to ſuſpect they have not. For, the Scorner from his very diſpoſition puts himſelf out of the way of ſatisfaction; he is diſqualified for impartial ſearches into divine truth. "The ſcorner ſeeketh "wiſdom and findeth it not." * He hath conceit enough to ſtart objections, but he hath not honeſty or impartiality enough to wait for an anſwer, nor to take up with an anſwer when made. He is ſo fond of his own opinion, and it is ſo much his wiſh and intereſt that it ſhould be true, that he naturally throws contempt on every thing that makes againſt it; he looks upon every thing of that kind as upon an enemy, with abhorrence and dread, and therefore hath as little to do with it as poſſible. How can ſuch a one as this ever judge of truth? However

* Prov. xiv. 6.

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deſtitute Religion may be of foundation, of all perſons the ſcoffer is moſt unlikely to detect it. If it is a Deceit, it is not ſo obvious a one as to be ſeen thro' by any one that can laugh or break a jeſt. One can never think that it ſhould be hid from the wiſe, honeſt, labourious enquirer, and be revealed only to thoſe who have neither diſpoſition nor capacity for enquiry, for want of humility or honeſty.

Nay further, I affirm the Scorner hath never made any due enquiries into the truths of Religion, "if he doth not know there is a great deal to be "ſaid for them;" and if he doth know this, his ſcorning is intolerable: becauſe, that is treating things which have conſiderable evidence of their being true, as the verieſt fancies and moſt groundleſs impoſtures. If he doth not embrace them, they merit a better regard than mockery: there is always a decency due to ſuch ſentiments tho' we think them not true. I hope it will be allowed, that ſcorning proves nothing; that reviling is not diſproving: If ſo, after all there remains a *poſſibility* on the ſide of Religious principles, and this very poſſibility, joined with the importance of the truths themſelves, render this humour and practice perfect madneſs. Were there but juſt proof enough to *ſtir* tho' not to *ſtagger* an infidel; were the evidences of theſe truths but ſlender; were there but enough to prove them poſſibilities, which nothing but ſtupid ignorance can deny, it is a folly not to be conceived, becauſe an hazard above every other, for any to take the chair of the Scorner. But

3. Theſe truths are demonſtrably very great *probabilities*. This, if made good, ſtill heightens the

extravagant wildneſs of their temper. And let any of this tribe, if they can, account for thoſe marks of Wiſdom and Deſign, the exact adapting of means to ends, and organs to uſe; the variety, harmony, and perfection that appears to their ſenſes throughout the creation, "without ſetting "a God at the head of all." Upon theſe grounds of probability "that there is a God," which are very ſtrong, let them, if they can, tell us, why this Being, who from the perfection of his nature is qualified, may not concern himſelf with the creatures he hath thought fit to produce? Why he, who is every where preſent and perfectly wiſe, may not direct and govern the world? Why he, who hath made an order of creatures capable of moral Government, may not *intend* to govern them, and make their happineſs and miſery to depend upon their pleaſing or diſpleaſing him? With which of his perfections can it claſh to treat Beings according to their natures? And if nothing can be brought againſt theſe with any degree of ſtrength, as I think the united force of the ſcorners may here be defied, then there is a great probability this is the caſe in fact, "That God is obſervant of our "behaviour, attentive to our cries, the diſpoſer "of our lot at preſent, and that his eyes are open "upon the ways of men, to give every one "hereafter according to his ways and the fruit "of his doings."

As to our own future exiſtence, and a ſtate of future rewards and puniſhments, there is ſufficient evidence to prove the ſtrong probability of both. If we carry about us any thing beſides, diſtinct from,

from, and ſuperior in its nature to body, let any ſcorner tell us what neceſſity there is *that* ſhould periſh with the body, or why we may not believe it the deſign of the Great former, that it ſhould exiſt ſeparately: and ſince every *other* paſſion hath its object, and we find it was not given us in vain or meerly to torment us, let any of them, if they can, tell us, why the paſſion of Immortality, as natural to us as the meaneſt paſſion is, ſhould not have its proper object provided for it.

Theſe hints are ſufficient I think to eſtabliſh *the probability* of theſe truths, whilſt more is ready to be offered to that end if it were needful; or if it were the deſign of this diſcourſe to enlarge upon them. What is ſaid is ſufficient to anſwer my intention, if it be ſufficient to prove that it is ignorance or prejudice not to allow them a good degree of probability. And if they are probable, it will eternally fix the brand of unreaſonableneſs upon the ſcorner, ſince his folly and guilt muſt bear a proportion thereto, and the hazard of a dreadful conſequence muſt encreaſe therewith.

4. Nothing ſhort of abſolute certainty and demonſtration that theſe doctrines cannot be true, can juſtify ſuch a behaviour, or exempt it from the charge of ſingular folly and madneſs. May-bees and meer poſſibilities of their falſhood, if there were any juſt ground for them, are not ſufficient for a creature that is reaſonable and naturally capable of immortality to proceed upon, in order to juſtify himſelf before God, if there be one, nor to himſelf neither. And the reaſon is this, Their conſequences are beyond all others awful and con-

cerning to himſelf, if they ſhould prove realities. It is diſtraction in any to deride thoſe principles, till it is abſurd to put that Queſtion, "What if they "ſhould be true?" and there will always be a juſt foundation for ſuch a Queſtion, till thoſe principles can be *demonſtrated* falſe and without foundation.

But can any one who underſtands the nature of the propoſitions, "That there is no God, That "there is no future ſtate of exiſtence after this," ever attempt ſuch a thing? I am ſure the bare pretending to it is a demonſtration they neither underſtand the terms, nor what they are going about. The moſt that can be ſaid, the furtheſt they can carry their ſophiſtry is "That it may be "ſo." But as I ſaid before, this will not do by any means. For, if there be only a May-be, a bare poſſibility on their ſide, there is neceſſarily a poſſibility *againſt* them; and then to ſcorn and deride them as if it were *impoſſible* they ſhould be true, really wants a name. I repeat it again; nothing but *demonſtration* of the falſhood of theſe principles can render mockery and ſcorn tolerable. Till then, that is, for ever, the Queſtions may ſtill be put without any hope of anſwer, "What "if there ſhould be a God? What if the Soul "ſhould ſurvive the Body? What if there ſhould "be a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments?" If there be any reply, it can never be ſuch as to affect the queſtions, but only to make the ſcorner's joints to tremble, and his heart to die within him. For, I cannot conceive any other than ſomething of this tenor, "Then, he falls under

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" the peculiar diſpleaſure of that Being, as certain-
" ly as he exiſts; from a behaviour the moſt in-
" ſolent, and an impiety of the deepeſt dye. Then,
" he is certainly and everlaſtingly undone, as he
" hath made no proviſion for his own future hap-
" pineſs, and hath ridiculed, in ſpight of conſcience
" and conſiderable evidence, an overwhelming woe.
" Then, he muſt appear before that Being who
" hath been the object of his contempt and ſcorn,
" I need not ſay with what aſtoniſhment, from the
" unexpectedneſs of the thing, and the then ap-
" parent diſtraction of his conduct."

And unleſs theſe ſcoffers are able to prove the principles of Religion *abſolute impoſſibilities*, they muſt know, if they will think, that theſe direful conſequences may follow their behaviour, theſe iſſues may take place. But who in their ſenſes would ſcorn, till they were *infallibly certain* there was no God to reſent their deriſion, that there was no poſſible hazard if they ſhould be in the wrong, or that things are demonſtrably what they wiſh them to be? And who, that hath any knowledge of what they ſpeak and affirm, would ever pretend to any thing of demonſtration or aſſurance? In ſuch an undertaking, I believe they would be ſcorned for fools by all the ſenſible part of their own tribe, and might without the leaſt arrogance or inſolence be eſteemed by all, ſtupid even to infatuation.

5. The principles theſe ſcorners oppoſe to thoſe of Religion, and the ends they propoſe by ſcorning Religion, are exceedingly injurious and detrimental. No one can engage deliberately in actions without ſome motive and view: the ſcoffers doubtleſs

leſs have theirs: nay, they declare it. Now what are they? Why, as the great Patrons of Liberty and Truth, they would free Mankind from the ties and bondage of Religious principles; they would deliver them from thoſe horrors that the belief of a God, a Providence, and a future ſtate of retribution ſubject them to. But, whatever they may ſtile themſelves, they are juſtly to be eſteemed *enemies to Mankind:* for hereby they would rob them of their beſt ſupports, their moſt chearing proſpects, and of what every one naturally wiſhes might be true. Would they help them off with their fears? Ay, but they ſtrip them of their hopes too. Would they reſcue them from one kind of fear? Probably they may, but they ſubject them to many others, each of which is of a tormenting kind. Hereby inſtead of freedom and happineſs, they introduce nothing but diſconſolacy, deſperation, and gloom.

What friends they are to Mankind will be further ſeen, by conſidering the benefits they propoſe to themſelves from ſcorning and trampling upon Religious principles. And they are evidently theſe and nothing better: "That they may follow their "inclinations and indulge their appetites as they "pleaſe: That they may embrace every propoſal "that they like without ſcruple or heſitation: "that they may get rid of their Reaſon, and get "the better of their Conſciences; ſuppreſs thought, "and fence againſt reflection, whereby they may "enjoy the freedom of acting without the in-"terruption of thoſe ſhackles, or paying any "ſlaviſh regard to Decency, Juſtice, Wiſdom and

" Truth." I allow from hence, when they have thus attained to the ſcoffer's chair, they may take greater ſcope and liberty than others. But are not theſe glorious advantages for a perſon to labour for? And labour it muſt be, where natural reaſon and conſcience have ever had any ſtrength, before they can attain to them. What do all theſe amount to more than this? " That they can make more " free with their Maker; are more at liberty for " vice, or are more ready for any propoſal of " that kind; can be greater ſlaves to their paſſions; " can multiply diſtreſſes in this world, and, if " there be another, can deſtroy their Souls; and " this more eaſily and ſpeedily than ſome others " can." I have not knowingly aggravated or miſrepreſented the matter in the leaſt, nor attempted to excite one Idea in the reader's mind, but what the nature of the thing carries in it. Sober conſideration, methinks, would lead every one to pronounce, there is no temptation in all this, if propoſed, to lead to that height of impiety, deriding and ſcoffing at Religion: but if there be any temptation, I am ſure there can be no recompence. Who would become a ſcorner when theſe are all his gains? When 'tis only from the loſs of reaſon and thought, that they themſelves can think them advantages at any time, and when they oftentimes muſt *feel* them the moſt unhappy circumſtances of their lives?

Thus have I endeavoured to ſet to view this Character and practice of ſcorning at Religion; from whence I think we may juſtly collect there is a peculiar abſurdity, guilt, and danger accompanying it.

SECT.

SECT. III.

BEFORE I proceed any further I would make this earneſt requeſt, That what hath been already offered may be conſidered and improved, for the fortifying our minds againſt infection from theſe ſort of perſons. They are not ſo few, nor ſo ſhy in the diſcovering their humour, as to render an antidote needleſs to any. The danger doth not ariſe from the arguments that they have to produce, nor from the addreſſes to the reaſon of others, but from their Numbers, which, with too many, gives this ſcorning temper the influence of a faſhion; and alſo from the plauſible ſtile they give to this their humour, I mean, that of Wit, Senſe, or a Free way of thinking; but neither of theſe can belong to it wherein they are real excellencies, or merit the eſteem and emulation of Mankind. However, from hence the infection is too often conveyed, and the poyſon taken down. To theſe may I not ſubjoin, their direct attacks on the natural paſſion of ſhame by jeſts and raillery, which many, eſpecially of the younger ſort, cannot ſtand? Theſe are indeed mean arts and pitiful triumphs, ſince the means is deception, and they are beholden to the weakneſſes and vitious inclinations of Mankind for ſucceſs: and, without any heſitation, we may pronounce all their pretenſions to promote Liberty and Truth downright impoſitions upon the credulity of Mankind, ſince their aim is manifeſtly

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meer victory, and ſince the worſt of ſlavery, the moſt uncomfortable and dangerous errors, are introduced by their ſucceſs.

That ſuch may never carry us over to their Tents, Let us conſider this ſcoffing humour as to the principles and practice of Religion, or as to a fear of ſin, a regard to God, and an Eternity before us, in the light wherein it hath been ſet. And ſure I am, none amongſt themſelves, who are fit to be reaſoned with, can deny, "That the "principles they deride, if they ſhould prove true, "are of more importance to us than any beſides. "They cannot deny a poſſibility of their Truth; "nay that there is a conſiderable probability; "inſomuch, that a multitude of facts which their "ſenſes and experience atteſt, can never be accounted for without admitting the truth of "thoſe principles: further, it is impoſſible from "the nature of the thing to prove them falſe, or "to be aſſured in a rational way they cannot be "true; nay, granting them what they would "have, that they ſhould prove fancies and fictions "in the end, yet their ſcorning them at preſent "miniſters no advantage to encourage a reaſonable "creature to join them, ſince the ſum of their "privilege is, only to be *more vitious*, or more "eaſily ſo, than others; which, were there no God "to puniſh hereafter, is in fact only to be *more* "*miſerable* than others at preſent." Thus I think the caſe truly ſtands. I hope every reader who hath embraced the principles of Religion and hath engaged in the practice of it, will, from what hath been offered, find himſelf much leſs liable to be

damped in his fervor, or unhinged in his courſe by any thing that ſcorners can throw out; ſince, after all their efforts to rob him of what is at the very foundation of his preſent peace, as a God, a Providence, and a future ſtate of exiſtence, they cannot rob him of the *poſſibility* of them; and ſince *this loweſt* of all thoſe circumſtances which guide or determine the human mind, is ſufficient to juſtify him in his *ſupream* regards thereto. For, tho' meer *poſſibility* reſpecting the truth of a thing, when ſingle and alone, is not of much moment or force; yet where a thing is undoubtedly poſſible, and at the ſame time from its very nature and conſequences is of *the utmoſt importance* if it ſhould prove a truth, the caſe is greatly altered; and amongſt the thinking part of Mankind it will be accounted a ſufficient reaſon to reſcue it from common ſcorn and contempt: how much more, which is the caſe before us, when *great probability* is on its ſide, continually growing upon enquiry, and *none* lying againſt it.

CHAP. V.

SECT. I.

SCORNING at Religion is the character and practice of many from downright ſtupidity, and diſuſe of their faculties; from an education in vice and the moſt ſervile employment of their underſtandings: they have ſcarcely ſenſes left them by their vices to exerciſe, or to enable them to

diſcern between good and evil. But this flows ſo naturally from another cauſe, that I think I ſhould be juſtified if, without any further enquiry, I ſhould reſolve it into that as the general cauſe and reaſon; I mean, "A reſolution to follow their own inclina-"tions and humours, and to admit of no reſtraints "in the proſecution of their pleaſures." Suppoſeing ſuch a reſolution as this, which the general behaviour of ſuch perſons proclaims, it is eaſy, and impartial reaſon would ſay it was juſt, to reſolve their ſcoffs and deriſions into this, if not as the only, yet as the principal cauſe. It is certain, the better any perſon is, the more delightful is it to him that there is a God, the ſtronger is his deſire of Immortality and the greater his ſatisfaction in it: and as his goodneſs improves, this ſatisfaction encreaſes. From hence there is great ground to believe, that it is a conſciouſneſs of vice and a reſolution to follow it which renders the truths of Religion at any time painful, and is at the bottom of this malignant ſcorning. When perſons are reſolved upon a full and unlimited indulgence, it naturally raiſes their ſpleen againſt every thing that would abridge or reproach them: this the principles of Religion muſt do: they immediately therefore turn enemies to them. And ſince they dare not deſcend to the merits of the cauſe, or to the goodneſs of the foundation, they have no other weapons to fight with againſt it, but ſcorn and deriſion. I would appeal to the *obſervation* of every one, whether ſuch a diſſoluteneſs of principles is not generally attended with a diſſoluteneſs of manners: and may I not alſo appeal to

the *reaſon* of every one, whether a reſolution for an unreſtrained gratification of the paſſions doth not naturally lead to an abhorrence of Religious principles, which ſtand in the way of their deſign, and propheſy nothing but evil to them? When perſons offer known affronts to Heaven, it concerns them to extirpate all apprehenſions of a God to puniſh them. "The fool hath ſaid in his heart, "No God †:" none for me! let there be none! it is the language of inclination and deſire, not of his underſtanding and judgment. When perſons live in the violation of natural conſcience, it becomes their intereſt to keep out or baniſh all apprehenſions of Immortality and Judgment: they cannot but be enemies to what is ſo deſtructive of their important wiſhes.

I am fully ſatisfied this is the grand reaſon and ſecret of the ſcorner's practice: they would run down thoſe things which they diſlike, and becauſe they diſlike them; they would fain bring them into diſgrace with themſelves, becauſe they check them in their purſuits, and becauſe they cannot think of them, but in pain. But, as ſome of them may think this mean and baſe, at leaſt may in words diſclaim it, ſo I would proceed to the

SECT. II.

THIRD thing I propoſed, to conſider the occaſions which they may ſtile the *reaſons* of their practice. There are ſome will tell us their deriding both the principles and practice of Re-

† Pſal. xiv. 1.

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ligion proceeds from juſt cauſes. In juſtice to my ſubject, out of a regard to truth on which ſide ſoever it lies, and for the ſatisfaction of the reader, I ſhall follow them in their pleas. And as far as I have been able to collect from converſation, obſervation, and hints which ſome of this ſort have dropt in print, the following things have had the greateſt ſtreſs laid on them, and have given the greateſt handle to this ſcorning humour.

It hath been ſometimes urged, " That there " have been a great many cheats and impoſtures " in the world, and great uſe hath been made " of Religion in every age to delude and make " a prey of Mankind, and therefore it merits " contempt and ſcorn, therefore ſuch a treatment " of it is juſtifiable."

Strange concluſion this! as to which I would appeal to the common underſtandings of men. Is there any connection or conſequence in this? " Many " have made uſe of Religion for the carrying on " vile and baſe deſigns, therefore there is no " truth in its principles, no foundation for its " practice." Surely the reality and truth of thoſe principles is abſolutely fixed and neceſſary, antecedent to all the uſes that men may put them to, and entirely independent therefore of all their abuſes! The ends and uſes they may employ them to ſubſerve can never affect their reality, or, if they were true before, render them a jot leſs ſo afterwards: how then can Religion itſelf merit their contempt, or how can their ſcorning that be juſtified? Further, can any thing of the moſt acknowledged truth and goodneſs eſcape abuſes, or

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the being employed for the carrying on ſome baſe deſign? Do not ill-minded perſons make uſe of the beſt things they can to accompliſh their ends? But is this ever allowed to alter the *nature* of thoſe things? If there was no foundation for Religious principles, if they were not approved univerſally by reaſonable minds, how ſhould deſigns be ſo ſucceſsfully carried on by their help? If they were ſo *notoriouſly* groundleſs as the ſcorner would have himſelf and others believe, they could never be made ſuch engines of as he pretends they are; mankind could not be ſo eaſily betrayed by them as he would repreſent. This itſelf therefore is a better argument for Religion, than any that he hath for his ſcorning. But, if this abuſive application of Religion affects the principles, or ſaps the foundation of it, I know not what can ſtand: if, becauſe men have made uſe of the principle of a Divine exiſtence, of a Providence, and a ſtate of future rewards and puniſhments to ſubſerve their own mean or vile ends of Mankind, it juſtly follows that there is no truth in the things themſelves, or that they from thence merit the treatment of impoſtures; the ſcorner whether he will or no muſt allow this further general conſequence, "that every thing which is abuſed and "miſapplied really wants truth and foundation:" and then I know not what can eſcape, or what will be left us. Honour, fidelity, juſtice, friendſhip, and reaſon itſelf muſt go, as being nothing in reality but engines of deceit; for all theſe have been abuſed and perverted to mean and baſe ends. And why don't theſe ſcorners exerciſe their talent upon

upon every thing alike, when there is equal ground? Why don't they rally in their coarſe way all pretenſions of ſincerity and honeſty, and, with their uſual decency, declare theſe to be no other than artifices whereby every one endeavours to put a cheat upon his neighbour? for in truth they have been applied to that end. It looks like diſhoneſty and is very unlike free-thinking, to ſingle Religion out for drollery and raillery becauſe it hath been abuſed, when every thing elſe that is excellent, and that they allow to have a reality and foundation hath ſuffered the ſame way, even every principle that they can ſet up inſtead of Religion.

Another occaſion of this ſcorning is, "An affectation of deeper thought and freer enquiry than "others: theſe perſons ſet up for greater wiſdom "and penetration than others. They would be "thought, from their renouncing commonly-received principles, to ſee further than other people, and to have detected the fallacy of ſome "things that hath lain hid from all excepting a "very few: agreeably to this, they repreſent thoſe "who believe and act upon the principles of Religion as a parcel of poor credulous people, who "believe any thing that is told them, and their "principles as the meer effects of education, arbitrarily inſtilled at firſt, and unreaſonably or "traditionally held to the laſt."

That this is *pure affectation* is very evident, becauſe this conceit of themſelves is entirely founded upon their thinking differently from others. But will any one calmly ſay, that meerly to differ from the reſt of the world is an argument of a better underſtand-

derſtanding, or that truth and falſhood is to be judged of by meer novelty or antiquity? this is new-ſtandard indeed! Scorning itſelf can never prove free enquiry or deep penetration, but may prove the contrary to both, and when exerciſed upon Religious principles doth do ſo; for I will venture to affirm, if it be any venture at all, that it never yet was the effect of enquiry or free thought. Could the embracing of Religious principles be reſolved abſolutely into an implicite faith, the rejecting them might argue deeper thought and enquiry: but when by the laws of our Religion we are not only permitted but enjoined to ſearch and try, to prove and examine what we more implicitely received in our education, and to ground all our faith upon evidence, it is ignorance or arrogance, and not greater wiſdom or penetration, to ſcoff at thoſe principles, which multitudes, of at leaſt equal abilities, more cloſe and impartial enquirers, and as honeſt as they can be for their lives, have believed and founded all their hopes upon.

As for credulity or eaſineſs of belief, which this ſcorning humour imputes to thoſe who receive theſe principles, it is aſtoniſhing with what face they can impute it to others *meerly* for that reaſon; as if there was *no* evidence attending them, as if there were *no* reaſons to ſupport ſuch a faith and practice, or as if it was upon that account theſe ſcorners rejected them. Whereas in truth, if they have any creed at all, it muſt be made up of ſuch abſurdities and contradictions, that they muſt be the moſt remarkable of all people living for credu-

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lity, or for believing both without and againſt reaſon. It is an inſolence that might juſtify a degree of indignation, for men to charge others with believing *any* thing, only becauſe they believe the beſt atteſted truths in the world, or meerly becauſe they believe things which the ſcorner doth not. It would be well if ſuch would conſider, that their meaſure of conceit, and their undiſtinguiſhing ſuſpicion of every body and every thing in matters of Religion, is full as likely to abuſe and miſlead them as the moſt eaſy credulity can do: and that their treating thoſe points with contempt and ſcorn, which both inſtinct and reaſon, not to mention revelation, concur in atteſting, is a mark of fond conceit and ridiculous affectation, yea of any thing *but* a ſuperior underſtanding or penetration. Were they but as much afraid of impoſing upon their own underſtandings, as they gravely pretend they are of having them impoſed upon by others; or of *not* believing things moſt obvious, important, and which have the ſtrongeſt evidence, as they pretend they are of believing upon little or no evidence, their contempt and ridicule of Religious principles would ſoon be exchanged for reverence, and they would ſcorn themſelves as much as they have derided others.

Another occaſion of this ſcorning temper is the behaviour and practice of many who profeſs Religion. "How many are there, ſaith the ſcoffer, "who publickly and warmly avow the principles, "but in life and conduct diſcard them? if they "are not matter of profeſſed belief they ſound the "alarm of Heretick and Infidel, whilſt that cir-

" cumſpection, holineſs, and uſefulneſs in life, which " theſe avowed principles demand, is entirely diſre- " garded; and they do no more, they live no bet- " ter, ſometimes much worſe, than thoſe who in " words diſclaim thoſe principles." This hath often opened the mouth of the ſcorner, and been produced as a warrant for their ſcorning at Religion itſelf as a jeſt and artifice. For ſay they, what truth can we ſuppoſe there is in theſe things, when thoſe whoſe province it is to ſearch into their foundations, as particularly the Clergy, and others who make a great noiſe about them in converſation, give ſuch glaring practical evidence they don't believe themſelves?

I acknowledge this is an unhappy caſe, and as to the general fact I wiſh it were not ſo often verified. I pretend not to excuſe ſuch be they of what order or claſs ſoever; but I muſt in juſtice demand of thoſe who are addicted to ſcorning, that the overflowings of their humour be confined to the perſons who are thus ſubjecting and expoſing themſelves, and that they blend not the innocent with the guilty, nor transfer their ſcorn from their practice to their principles. For, the queſtion which the ſcoffer is concerned in is, not, whether ſome do profeſs the principles of Religion who do not really believe or regard them; but this, "Whether the principles them- " ſelves have not the moſt ſufficient ſatisfactory evi- " dence attending them agreeing to their nature, and " whether the inconſiſtencies of others will bear him " out in this contemptuous rejection, if at laſt he " ſhould find there is a God that judgeth." Theſe perſons will not allow that Religion hath ever the

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more foundation, becauſe many do really believe its principles and adhere to its practice; why then ſhould they make it an evidence of its *wanting* foundation, that any of its profeſſed adherents do not act in conformity to it? If the faith and practice of the one doth not affect the nature of the things, neither can the disbelief and inconſiſtency of the other. No; the ſcorner hath full liberty of examining the principles themſelves: he is under no reſtraint but his own inclination from enquiring, on what foot the Divine exiſtence, the Soul's immortality, and a future ſtate of recompence ſtand. To theſe enquiries let him go: that is the way to be ſatisfied if he *deſires* to know how matters really are. The *behaviour* of perſons is never allowed to be a rule of judging the truth of principles by: it may be an evidence of their own perſonal belief or disbelief of them, but never can evidence what foundation the principles themſelves have. To take occaſion then to ſcorn and deſpiſe Religious principles, from the unſuitable behaviour of thoſe who profeſs them, only betrays a ſtrong diſpoſition in ſuch to ſcorn; it only proves their averſion to them, and ſhews what they would *wiſh* them to be, groundleſs fictions; but it can never juſtify their deriſion, nor in the leaſt impair the ſtrength of Religion's foundations.

Theſe are ſome of the chief occaſions of this humour, in which I hope the reader ſees that there is nothing to juſtify it, or to reſcue it from the charge of unreaſonableneſs, crime, and madneſs.

SECT. III.

THE ſcornful are evidently of two ſorts. Some this way attack the *very principles* of Religion themſelves, and it may be, through their debaucheries or the long application of ſcorn and ridicule may have brought themſelves to disbelieve them, and really to laugh at them as fables and impoſtures. In pure pity and compaſſion to ſuch, not knowing but this may fall into ſome ſuch hand, I would addreſs myſelf to them, beſeeching them by all that is dear to them, by all that is ſerious and valuable; as they love themſelves, or, if there be a God, as they hope to ſhare his love, that they would conſider the folly that their practice betrays, and the riſque they run in the conſequences, whatever their over-weaning opinion of their underſtandings, or their ſenſual inclinations may lead them to believe.

I would appeal to and ask ſuch, if they have the reaſon of men, whether if the principles of Religion are true, they are not from their very nature of more importance than any thing beſides themſelves? If there is ſuch a Being as the Lord our God is deſcribed to be, of ſuch Power, Purity, and Juſtice; ſo intimately preſent with us, ſo particularly obſervant of us, who will finally and for ever adjudge our ſtate from his perfect knowledge of our hearts and ways. — If as to our better part, our Souls, we are deſignedly immortal, and are now upon our trial for an happineſs inconceivably great, or liable to an equal puniſhment. — Who with any underſtanding but muſt acknowledge, that theſe are infinitely

finitely more concerning to us than any thing that can enter into our hearts beſides? Methinks then however doubtful they were, if at the ſame time they were *barely poſſible*, they ought to be conſidered and ſeriouſly ſpoken of. There cannot be any room for jeſt and drollery. No one in his wits can think that a Being of infinite power, all-knowing and juſt, or that eternal happineſs and miſery, are ſubjects of deriſion and ſcorn, unleſs they were palpable abſurdities and contradictions. But where is the hardy creature that will attempt the proof of this? And if they are not downright abſurdities and contradictions, their very nature ſaith there may be truth in them: but before the ſcorner's behaviour can be vindicated by reaſon "he muſt be abſolutely certain "they cannot be ſo." And will you put the hazard of your eternal ſtate upon the foot of your ability of demonſtrating that there is no God, no ſtate of exiſtence after this? Whoever hath arrived to this pitch of ſtupidity is paſt reaſoning with. But I appeal to the conſciences of ſuch, whether their ſcoffs, their ridicule and contempt ever aroſe from any *evidence* of the falſhood of theſe principles, or whether they did not entirely reſult from a *bare wiſh* that there might be nothing in them? Are not their guilt and their fears the ſprings of their ſcorning? Is not the reaſon of their endeavouring to run down the belief of a God and a future ſtate of recompences, "becauſe they can extract nothing but terrors from "thence?" But, what is all this more than merely to wiſh they may not be true? Fond man! conſider the vanity of thy wiſhes! It may be for thy intereſt to wiſh there was no God, no ſtate after this:

this: but ſo much the more dreadful thy circumſtance that thou haſt made it neceſſary, "when "thou haſt nothing but a wiſh for it." This only ſaith what thou wouldſt have to be true, but doth not carry the leaſt evidence, or yield the leaſt ground to believe, it is ſo. If thy wiſhing or thy ſcoffing either would *make* things true or falſe, it were to thy purpoſe; but can either of them work in that manner? Canſt thou think of altering things by thy imagination or inclination? Try the experiment firſt in lower matters, either in reſpect of thy health or thy ſubſtance, and ſee what wiſhes and imagination can do there.

Well then; if all thou haſt for there being *no* God, *no* future ſtate, is only a wiſh, I muſt tell thee there is as much demonſtration on the other ſide as the caſe will admit, which is always accounted as much as a wiſe and reaſonable perſon ſhould require. If the Queſtion, "what if theſe things ſhould be "true," when ſeriouſly put to thyſelf, is enough to ſhudder thee, and more than thou canſt ever anſwer, what will the certainty and the conviction do with thee hereafter, if that be thy experience? Vain imagination! to think that thou canſt carry thy ſcoffs even to the grave, if thou loſeſt not the exerciſe of thought before! It is very great odds, but thy ſenſeleſs Chance, Fate, and Fortune, to which thou aſcribeſt every event, ſhall be exchanged for the powerful apprehenſion of an exiſting God; that the fond conceit of Inſenſibility at death will vaniſh at the approach of a terrible hereafter, THE SOMETHING beyond the grave. If thou couldſt ſcoff

under

under one apprehenſion, I am ſure thou wilt dreadfully recoil and ſhrink under the other.

But what is thy ſurprize like to be, when thoſe realities, thoſe comparatively *only* realities, of an Almighty God and an Unchangeable Eternity, which in thy fond conceit thou haſt treated as dreams and phantoms, ſhall appear in their direful *demonſtration!* When it ſhall be all *ſight* and *experience!* When thou ſhalt "feel there is a God in the terrors "of his juſtice," and be convinced by what thou ſuſtaineſt "that the preſages of Eternity in thy own "frame were true!" What will the ſenſations of thy own mind be from its reflections upon its paſt deriſion and ſcorn? How abſolutely wilt thou become the object of thy *own* deteſtation and ſcorn, which is much harder to bear than all that the world can pour out upon thee? If the truths of a Divine exiſtence and a future ſtate are *poſſible*, it is poſſible for this to be thy caſe; which one would think no reaſonable creature could bear the apprehenſion of: and that they are poſſible, he is not a Man that denies. If they prove a *certainty*, they fix the certainty of this thy condition; a condition no human tongue can repreſent.

I would appeal once more; is it not wiſdom in matters of infinite conſequence if they ſhould prove true, ſuppoſing them to be doubtful, to chuſe the ſafeſt ſide? And what is the ſafeſt ſide in reſpect of theſe truths, "but to regard them as if they were cer-"tain?" For, if they prove deluſions thou canſt not upon the whole be ordinarily a ſufferer in this ſtate nor canſt thou ſuffer for thine error hereafter: *that* will periſh with thee. If there be no God, there

will be none to call thee to an account for thy miſtake: if there be no future ſtate thou wilt fare as well as thy fellow-mortals. But, if they prove realities, as they are indiſputably poſſibilities, if thou haſt regarded them thou art eternally happy.—— It is then at leaſt a wiſe and rational belief; put it at the loweſt it is a noble adventure: and if it is ſo, what is the practice of the ſcorner for folly and danger!

What hath been offered I hope contains ſufficient reaſons for ſuch to make a ſtand, to reflect upon their behaviour, and to bring it to the teſt of reaſon and conſcience. Their paſt indecent and wicked behaviour is now retrievable; and it is diſtraction to continue their ſcornings till death convinces them. For, it is the evidence that attends theſe truths, productive of their *belief* of them at preſent, which will finally ſtand them in ſtead; the evidence of ſight and experience comes too late. In compaſſion therefore to ſuch I would earneſtly entreat them, if they are really diſſatisfied about the principles of Religion, with the greateſt impartiality and diligence to enquire into their evidence. For a time ſuſpend your ſcoffs and lay aſide your levity. You can retire and uſe much diſcipline for the cure of a chronical diſtemper, nor do you think it long or hard if you are any way ſucceſsful at laſt. Surely the call to retirement and thought under the preſent circumſtances of your minds is at leaſt equally loud, and the end equally reaſonable! Do not ſcoff away your ſouls. Every thing reproaches ſuch a levity; and I am ſure, Man hath the higheſt reaſon to be ſerious who hath ſuch poſſibilities, yea ſuch awful certainties,

before

before him to attend to, as an Almighty God and an eternal ſtate of happineſs or miſery. If the event amount not to a ſerious reflection upon their conduct, it forebodes a dreadful reſolution of trying the iſſue, which I ſadly fear they will find the ſame with "a "reſolution to be everlaſtingly miſerable."

But there is another ſort of ſcoffers; who profeſs ſome regard to the Principles of Religion and after a ſort believe them, whilſt yet they ſcorn and ridicule a behaviour in others that anſwers to ſuch principles. They would account it a reproach and reflection to be ſuſpected of denying them, and yet deride thoſe who act in a conformity to them. Surely ſuch a conduct as this teſtifies they never ſeriouſly reflect upon the matter, nor weigh their own behaviour! If they did, they could not but ſee the ſhocking inconſiſtency of it, and that the reproach they endeavoured to faſten upon others returns with double force upon themſelves. For,

"They ſcoff at the Religious for believing in "reality what they themſelves allow to be true." But what ſhadow of reaſon is there in this for deriſion? To ſay that Religious principles are true, is to ſay they are believed by themſelves, and ought to be believed by others: the more firm and hearty then the aſſent of the mind is to them, the more is their truth and importance anſwered. If the ſcorners themſelves think there is evidence ſufficient to make them articles of their *profeſſed* belief, it muſt be ſtill more rational and commendable to be rooted and eſtabliſhed in the belief of them, or which is the ſame thing, *really* to believe what they *profeſſedly* aſſent to. If they allow them to be true, they acknow-

ledge they have a claim to the aſſent of the mind; the more thoroughly therefore the mind doth aſſent thereto, the greater ſuitableneſs is there in the act to the objects. So that theſe Scorners reproach the Religious for paſſing what they themſelves eſteem a right judgment; for doing that in reality which they themſelves ſay ought to be done in ſhew and words, and for treating thoſe things as truths which are confeſſed truths with themſelves.

But the unreaſonableneſs of theſe ſcoffers behaviour appears ſtill more monſtrous, when it is conſidered "that they deride the Religious for acting "according to the ſcorners own principles." Every one that can diſtinguiſh muſt allow the principles of Religion to be of ſuch concern and moment, that, if really believed, they muſt naturally influence the practice. What is thus natural to a reaſonable creature, as reaſonable, can never be ridiculous in ſuch a one: Much leſs have they, who in general allow their truth, any *reaſon* for deriding others for acting agreeably to them; nay, of all the unreaſonables this is one of the greateſt in the world. For, this ſort of ſcorners admit that there is a God, and yet mock at thoſe who by their homage acknowledge it, or manifeſt any ſenſe of him: they allow that he is Almighty, Wiſe, Holy, and Good, and yet laugh at thoſe who expreſs any fear, hope, and truſt in him: they ſay, when they are appealed to, that his favour or diſpleaſure muſt make an inconceivable difference in our ſtate, and yet ridicule thoſe who ſeek the one and endeavour to avoid the other: they will acknowledge the ſoul of man is immortal, and that an happineſs or miſery ſuited to that im-

mortality muſt be the portion of all hereafter, and yet they jeſt at all concern of mind that the Religious expreſs in the ſecuring a glorious and honourable immortality: they will confeſs there can be no felicity here but in the peace of our conſciences, nor none hereafter but in the approbation of God, and yet ſcorn thoſe who ſcruple the loſing of their peace, and are ambitious of keeping themſelves in the Divine love: In ſhort, they will allow that this uncertain ſtate is deſignedly a trial for Eternity, from whence it muſt conſequently derive its value, and yet they laugh at thoſe who are governing their conduct by it, who prefer their Souls to their bodies, Eternity to time, or are making a due preparation for it. Their behaviour would not be more extravagant and wild, ſhould they deride others for following any of the principles of ſelf-love and ſelf-preſervation; in preferring eaſe, wealth, pleaſure, and happineſs before pain, want and miſery; or for ſcrupling to run into the fire, or to throw themſelves down a precipice with their eyes open. Certainly, if it is barbarous not to profeſs the principles of Religion, it can never be ridiculous to follow them or be governed by them! If it is matter of diſgrace not to own and avow them, it can never be matter of common ſcorn to behave with that circumſpection, ſeriouſneſs, and ſtrictneſs which thoſe avowed principles demand! On the contrary, we cannot more expoſe ourſelves to *juſt* deriſion, than by counter-acting our own profeſſed belief of matters ſo important, allowing and diſregarding them at the ſame time. I hope therefore none who thus ſee how the caſe really ſtands, will ever be moved from their ſtedfaſtneſs

by any ſuch attempt. Place the ridicule where it ought to lie; it belongs to thoſe who in the moſt obvious caſe ſee not what is ridiculous, nor that they are expoſing themſelves to juſt deriſion, in deriding others for governing themſelves by reaſon, for acting conſiſtently, and practically regarding thoſe principles which the ſcoffer himſelf profeſſes. Nothing can be more abſurd and ſtupid than ſcorn and laughter thus placed; except it be, "the admitting their influence, either by deſerting the practice of Religion, or meanly concealing our regards to it, upon their account."

SECT. IV.

I SHALL cloſe with ſome advices to thoſe, who are at preſent advocates and friends to Religion, and who deſire to continue ſo. They are deſigned as preſervatives againſt the influence of this unreaſonable and wicked practice, amidſt our unavoidable converſe at ſome times with theſe ſcorners, and the danger we are thence in of infection from them.

1. Let us never converſe with ſuch but as pure neceſſity leads us. Relation or buſineſs may render ſome concern with them unavoidable: but I think the maintaining a civility towards ſuch, and the diſpatching of our buſineſs with them, ought to limit our converſe. Where perſons are of this ſcorning humour, we cannot be long with them, at leaſt not in a free hour, but we muſt be witneſſes of their talent; from whence no *advantages* can poſſibly ariſe: ſuch converſation cannot enlighten or improve the

mind; but on the contrary, it muſt vex the ſoul that is truly righteous, it may greatly unhinge thoſe who cannot bear a jeſt, or have not capacity to diſtinguiſh between what *is* derided and what *deſerves* it, who were bidding very fair for Religion and Heaven before: it may corrupt their minds and greatly diminiſh the veneration and regard they had for ſacred things. And conſidering what ſuch ſcoffing is levelled at, I think our duty to God, to ourſelves, and to the common intereſt of Mankind demand an *expreſs* reſentment, by leaving ſuch company. They ſcorn, no doubt, not only to keep themſelves in countenance, or to diſplay the ſilly thing they ſtile wit, but to bring others over to their tents. Being determined never to be *reaſoned into* ſerioufneſs, they have the confidence to try whether others cannot be *laughed out* of it. An attempt this is, that the very dignity of human nature requires ſhould be received with indignation: not to their hurt or ſuffering any way, but in order to our own ſecurity. For, what pretence of advantage have they to make to us? They would laugh us out of all our ſolid ſupport and comfort both in life and at death: they would ridicule us out of a belief of a Being that is our Preſerver, Benefactor, Guide, and therein the object of our hope and truſt beyond what all the world can be; who is perfectly able, and may be regularly relied upon to conduct us through all the changes and hazards of our pilgrimage, and to introduce us to a ſtate of perfect happineſs hereafter: nay, they would banter us out of every great and generous thought, every noble aim and expectation -- andwhen we have ſurrendred theſe, what are we to have? — Nothing

that

that I can find, but the pleaſure of ſcorning with them at things wherein our higheſt intereſt lies, things of the laſt conſequence to us, things that can never be diſproved: ſo that the bleſſedneſs amounts but to this, "we ſhall have the pleaſure of being "fools, mad, and miſerable for company."

Beſides; there is this reaſon for a very ſparing converſe with ſuch ſcorners; as their practice can never inſtruct or improve us, ſo their diſpoſition ſcarcely admits of a conviction or inſtruction from us. Whilſt this temper and humour prevails, no argument or reaſon is likely to influence: for as ſoon as any thing like them appears, they are at once ſuppreſſed under the brand of *preaching*; they are immediately condemned under the term of *ſerioufneſs*; with both which the ſcorner is at open defiance. Now, who would aſſociate with thoſe, who will neither receive any benefit, nor can communicate any? Whilſt at the ſame time all that diſtinguiſhes us as Men, and all that we juſtly triumph in as Chriſtians, is hazarded thereby.

2. Let us be upon our guard, that we are not deluded by appearances and pretenſions. This ſcoffing humour, as it often proceeds from an affectation of Wit, ſo it too much influences others from an apprehenſion of its being ſo; eſpecially the younger ſort. To be witty, ſtands with many for *every* thing; and they are ready to ſacrifice any thing for the gaining of ſuch a Character. It is very ſtrange, that, amongſt perſons who can think, it ſhould ever paſs for an accompliſhment to turn every thing into jeſt or ridicule; or that the attempting it ſhould ingratiate any perſon! This looks

looks as if Wit was made up of a command of words and a ſhameleſs face, or an ability of ſaying any thing of any thing, without regard to truth, decency, or good manners: if this is an excellency I know not what is a deformity. Whatever talents a man poſſeſſes, if they are employed to deſtroy the eternal diſtinction of things, to throw down what it is the higheſt intereſt of Mankind to believe and maintain the reputation of; let it have what plauſible name it will, it is really the higheſt inſolence and injury, and merits nothing but contempt and deteſtation. I hope none will ever ſurrender their Religion to any Phantom of wit or humour, or in the leaſt ſuſpect the principles thereof, becauſe others take freedom with them, or droll upon them. This can never affect either their truth or importance. It is a very eaſy matter for the loweſt ſized underſtanding to throw out what may excite a laugh; and a very common thing for a laugh to go round, at what, if you abſtract the impudence or prophaneneſs of the thing, hath nothing in it. But what hath truth and falſhood to do with ſuch things, or how can we diſtinguiſh one from the other by ſuch means? Such an undiſtinguiſhing mind, with all its bold ſays, can never make Religion, but only itſelf, ridiculous, with all thinking perſons.

3. Let us diligently beware of inconſiſtencies: and this both for the ſake of others and ourſelves. Let us do this for the ſake of *others:* in order to cut off a conſiderable occaſion of ſcoffing at Religion from thoſe who ſeek occaſion, and who make no greater improvement of any thing to this end, than

than the inconſiſtencies of thoſe who profeſs it. Do we believe there is a God? Let us act as under his eye, and with a governing view to his approbation. Do we believe we are deſigned for another ſtate, and that the iſſue of the preſent life will be reward or puniſhment unſpeakable? Let our conduct ſhew that we live by faith and not by ſenſe. Do we believe a ſolemn day of retribution, when rewards or puniſhment ſhall be fully adjudged to every one according to their deeds? let us ſee to it that we are in all things governed by the Goſpel of Chriſt, which we believe to be the rule of the expected Judgment. This would prevent much ſcorning, and thereby render our temptation leſs from that quarter; nay it would be Religion's great credit and defence —— But let us beware of inconſiſtencies, from the influence and tendency they have to the reconciling us to the chair of the ſcorner. If we *indulge* our ſelves in acting contrary to our belief in any inſtance, or as if we did not believe Religious principles, we are in great danger of joining the ſcorners, at leaſt as to that particular article to which our practice runs counter. For inſtance; Do we believe at preſent that we are deſigned for another ſtate? but if we allow ourſelves in what renders the thought very painful, who can tell how long this may be the matter of our faith? The uneaſineſs of mind which our conduct occaſions by means of that article, will render it very ſoon our *wiſh* that there was no ſuch ſtate: and when it thus appears neceſſary for our peace that there ſhould be none, ſhall we not eaſily admit diſputes about it, whether it is ſo

certain

certain as we thought, and whether much may not be offered againſt it? In this caſe ſhall we not be very willing to embrace objections againſt it, and be thankful to thoſe who can ſupply us, and thereby help us off with it? From hence, having much accuſtomed ourſelves to converſe with objections to the neglect of the evidences, we are greatly prepared to fling it up and join with others in their ſcorning. The more careful we are to act conſiſtently with the articles of our faith, the faſter ſhall we hold them, and the leſs influence will all temptations to doubt or ſcorn them have upon us. If we would but ſo live that a Divine exiſtence, a future ſtate, and a judgment day were our *hope* and *conſolation*, we ſhould be able to ſuſtain any attacks from the ſcorner, and ſoon diſcern their treatment of Religion proceeds not from any counter-evidence, but a dread and abhorrence of the truths they deride. In a word, whilſt we live as thoſe important truths require, our hopes of their final fulfillment will be a perpetual ſpring of pleaſure, and thereupon every one will be eſteemed our worſt enemy that attempts to depreciate them, or to deprive us of them.

4. Let us guard againſt the prevalency of a drolling jeſting humour. I am far from being an enemy to Chearfulneſs, but on the contrary, under the regulation of reaſon would promote it all I could, as conſiſtent with Chriſtianity, promoted by it, and a recommendation of the ſtricteſt regards to it. Nevertheleſs, it is capable of degenerating into its neighbouring extream, Levity: and when thus degenerated and accompanied with a

readineſs of thought, it may betray into an humour very detrimental to Religion. It is the indulged practice of ſome, to be continually jeſting and giving light turns to things: if this is not under a check, we ſhall find not only, as we often do, that friend and intereſt are both ſacrificed thereto, but that it will lead us to ſpare nothing however ſacred, and to level every thing that comes before us. When there is an habit of turning things into ridicule it takes a perſon off his guard, he loſes the ſenſe of the difference in things; he is indiſpoſed to attend to any thing ſerious *as ſerious* or weighty, and is thereby very eaſily led, not only to ſuck in, but to *chuſe* the repreſentations of things that jeſts and humour gives of them, and to make free with every thing that comes before him, the moſt ſolemn things not excepted. Tho' this doth not affect the nature of the things, yet it muſt affect *his apprehenſion* of them, and the influence they have upon him: ſacred things, it is allowed, are ſtill ſacred, and important truths are ſtill important; but I believe no one will ſay that they *appear* the one or the other to the mind that is dreſsing up every thing in the air of a jeſt, or that they can be regarded according to their nature, but according to their repreſentation. If we find a ſtrong diſpoſition therefore to this humour, and delight in it, it is of the greateſt importance that we ſet a guard upon it: it is a ſad leveller where it prevails, for it deſtroys the wheat with the chaff; it naturally leads to that company where a man ſoon commences a ſcorner, it reconciles the mind to the prophaneneſs of ſuch perſons, and cuts off all

opportunity and capacity of better information and remedy.

5. Let us endeavour to grow in goodneſs, and to get an experimental acquaintance with the ſatisfaction and advantages of Religion, both in principle and practice. A mind under the ſtated influence of Chriſtian principles, a will, affections and conduct under the influence of Chriſtian precepts, would ſtrongly fortify againſt the more beguiling or forcible attacks of the ſcorner. A growth in grace the Apoſtle recommends as a preſervative againſt all practical errors, againſt all the ſeducements of the wicked †. What! when we have found the ſweets of Religion, when we have experienced the many advantages flowing from the belief of its principles and the conduct of its rules.— Shall we ever ſurrender to a ſcoff, a bold jeſt, or an empty witticiſm! No; a perſon's experience is uſually the laſt thing that he parts with: we are wont to ſay, there is no *argument* againſt it; it is very probable therefore that no deriſion, ſneers, or laugh will prevail againſt it, which have no *ſhew of argument*. We do not know enough of Religion to enable us to bear any thing for it, or to abide by it. If we would but cultivate Religion by the practice of it, we ſhould find that it miniſters the courage and produces that love to itſelf, which are neceſſary for our adhering to it. When our reaſon and experience unite in their teſtimony for Religion, all the attempts of the ſcorner will appear highly injurious as well as unreaſonable; intereſt will conſpire with our judgments to ſet us at the fartheſt remove, both from their chair and their company. Let us labour

† 2. Pet. iii. 17. 18.

therefore to feel more of the power of that Religion, which hath Love, Peace, and Hope for its principles, and the perfection of every thing felicitating for its ſcope and end. As our own inward holineſs improves, the more ſhall we feel a reſentment and abhorrence of the ſcorner's pratice, as the higheſt affront offered to our reaſon, an inſolent denial of our own experience, and an inhuman attempt upon our moſt valuable intereſt.

To cloſe: May he who ſcorneth the ſcorners, but giveth grace to the humble, bleſs us with, and preſerve to us that ſerious, humble, teachable diſpoſition, by which only we can attain to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jeſus, or be kept in the way of truth which he hath preſcribed. May thoſe who hold Religion at preſent in ſcorn and deriſion, be engaged by the divine grace ſeriouſly to lay their practice to heart, and be brought by conviction out of the chair of the ſcorner, to the knowledge of thoſe benefits the Religion of Jeſus ſecures at preſent, and to the rewards it will introduce them to at laſt.

F I N I S.